



THE SUNDAY TIMES



Solo holiday special

Travel



How Musk took over Twitter
The inside story

Magazine

Wallace ‘threatened US that he would cancel order for Chinook helicopters’

Harry Yorke
Deputy Political Editor

Ben Wallace was accused of causing a diplomatic incident with the US after threatening to cancel an order of American-made military helicopters intended for use by Britain’s special forces. The former defence secretary issued the warning directly to his counterpart in the Pentagon last

month before an agreed position had been reached among ministers in London. The row, which embroiled the British and American ambassadors, forced Downing Street to intervene in an attempt to defuse tensions. Wallace, who formally stepped down as defence secretary on Thursday, had hoped to succeed Jens Stoltenberg as the secretary-general of Nato. In June, Wallace

acknowledged that his campaign to take over the military alliance had failed, after President Biden refused to back his candidacy. Stoltenberg, a former prime minister of Norway, has extended his term by a year. Allied leaders are said to be looking for a former head of state to replace him. Last month, Wallace publicly voiced his frustration over the lack of support from the White House,

telling The Sunday Times: “Why do you not support your closest ally when they put forward a candidate? I think it’s a fair question.” It can now be disclosed that Wallace, 53, spent his final weeks in office pushing to cancel the deal to buy 14 Chinook H-47 extended-range helicopters for UK special forces. The first of the new aircraft, made by Boeing, had been due to be delivered by 2026. America said

that they would improve the UK’s ability to contribute to joint operations with Nato partners. However, UK sources said that in recent weeks Wallace began to express serious misgivings about the deal. During internal discussions, he proposed cancelling it as part of a cost-cutting exercise to relieve pressure on the MoD’s tight budgets. Sources close to Wallace said he had tried to cancel the

project during the last spending review, but had been assured that delaying it would produce savings of close to £200 million. The costs have since ballooned, rising by approximately £500 million to about £2.3 billion. Wallace argued that he could buy two Airbus A400M Atlas transport aircraft for £500 million. There is also a debate about whether the UK needs the capabil-

ity. A source close to Wallace said Britain already had the biggest heavy-lift fleet in Europe, and that the money could be better spent on medium-lift support helicopters, which are cheaper to run. There are also concerns that the UK lacks the communications, satellite technology and transport to carry out special forces operations with the Chinooks. “Spending **Continued on page 2** →

Asbestos fears in crumbling buildings

Collapse of aerated concrete could release deadly fibres in schools, hospitals and offices

ACT NOW ON ASBESTOS

Ben Spencer, Shaun Lintern and Megan Agnew

Scores of public buildings caught up in the crumbling concrete crisis are also likely to be riddled with deadly asbestos, it emerged yesterday. Emergency steps are being taken in England to shore up public sector buildings because of fears their structural integrity is being undermined by deteriorating reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC). Police stations, leisure centres, offices and council buildings are also likely to contain the substance. Experts fear the presence of RAAC also increases the danger of exposure to asbestos, which kills 5,000 people a year in the UK. Matt Byatt, president of the Institution of Structural Engineers, said yesterday: “There are two real risk-to-life elements to this: if RAAC collapses it puts life at risk in an instantaneous manner; and asbestos can be deadly if it’s inhaled. “These are not lightweight issues – they are very serious, and they should be treated as such.” The Sunday Times is campaigning for the government to introduce a proactive, phased removal

of asbestos. RAAC and asbestos often exist in the same buildings, as both were used widely in the postwar building boom. Asbestos is safe while stable, but if disturbed – as it would be in a building collapse – it could release fibres that, if inhaled, can cause mesothelioma, asbestosis and lung cancer. In July it emerged that thousands of children were still being taught in schools containing asbestos – despite a ban on the material being imposed by 1999. About 10,000 teachers, pupils and staff are estimated to have died from asbestos exposure at schools in the past four decades. Asbestos is also a serious problem for the NHS. Last week, 156 schools were told their buildings contained the crumbling concrete. Of those, 104 will have to partially or fully shut. The start of term will be delayed for thousands of pupils, while others will have to return to online learning or be taught in office blocks. One school in Kent is planning to serve lunch in classrooms. RAAC – often described as “Aero bar” concrete – was used throughout public buildings from the 1950s to the 1980s. It is found in planks,

panels and beams on flat roofs. Air pockets make the concrete vulnerable to moisture and eventually crumbling. It can sag gradually over time before suddenly collapsing. The problem was first highlighted in 1999 and became critical after the partial collapse of a roof at a school in Kent in 2018. More than 40 NHS sites are affected with seven hospitals needing to be rebuilt. Yesterday documents released under the Freedom of Information Act from nearly a dozen hospitals revealed the severity of problems facing NHS trusts. At West Suffolk Hospital an assessment from April this year warned of a “catastrophic” and “likely” risk of potential failure of the main hospital building. This would cause “loss of life and/or major injury”. It added “asbestos and dust inhalation” was a big risk and staff could be “provided FFP3 masks” to wear post-collapse. The report also warned of possible legal liability for trust managers under corporate manslaughter legislation. Similar concerns have been raised at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital, where, in a report released in February, RAAC panels were found to be rapidly deteriorating. It noted a risk of sudden catastrophic collapse “despite remedial structural solutions being put in”. Labour’s shadow health secretary, Wes Streeting, said the documents showed “a terrifying picture of the state of our hospitals after 13 years of Conservative neglect”. He said: “The Conservatives **Continued on page 2** →



Mohamed Fayed with his wife, Heini Wathen-Fayed, and three of their four children, from left, Omar, Karim and Camilla, celebrating 25 years of steering Harrods in 2010. The siblings, with eldest daughter Jasmine, face a Succession-style scramble for his business empire

Children in line for Fayed’s £1.7bn fortune

Robert Watts and Glen Keogh

He grew up in the slums of Egypt selling Coca-Cola and died a self-made billionaire. Yet Mohamed Fayed’s legacy following his death at the age of 94 remained his determined, and often delusional, attempt to blame the royal family for his son Dodi’s death in a car crash alongside Diana, Princess of Wales. Now, the scene is set for a Succession-style squabble among the businessman’s four children from his second wife, Heini Wathen, 68, over his £1.7 billion empire. While the former Harrods

owner’s later decades were overshadowed by his blinkered pursuit for justice, Fayed, who was buried alongside his eldest son on Friday following an Islamic ceremony at Regent’s Park Mosque, remained a shrewd entrepreneur. At various stages of his long and colourful life, Fayed was the owner of luxury apartments in London’s Park Lane and New York’s Manhattan; a stately home in Surrey; a Scottish castle set in 65,000 acres of land; nine Rolls-Royces; an enviable art collection; and a larger-than-life statue of Michael Jackson that was displayed for a short time outside the Craven Cottage ground

of Fulham FC, the football club he once owned. Following his death, dozens of multimillion-pound assets – including the jewel of the empire, the Paris Ritz hotel – are to be inherited by his children, with assets also transferring to Wathen, a Finnish socialite and former model. But relations are already frayed between Jasmine, 42, Karim, 39, Camilla, 38, and Omar, 35. At a High Court hearing in 2021, Omar claimed he was assaulted by Camilla’s bodyguards in a row over a mobile phone, while she claimed he was “on drugs” at the time. A

judge willed the warring siblings to settle the matter privately. Like the tales Fayed enjoyed weaving about himself, the truth behind many of his most extravagant purchases is similarly difficult to unravel. Assets of the Egyptian-born entrepreneur span the world, with ownership held through trusts and in tax havens including Bermuda, Luxembourg and Liechtenstein. Fayed was laid to rest in **Continued on page 2** →

FLAMBOYANT AND DECEITFUL
Mohamed Fayed, by Tom Bower
Pages 4-5

Bank staff who fail to swipe in for three days a week could lose bonuses

Jill Treanor City Editor

The American banking giant Citi has started monitoring how often its 12,500 staff in Britain come in to the office – and could dock the bonuses of those who do not turn up at least three days a week. It is the latest sign that big employers are stepping up efforts to get staff to return to their desks. The final Covid restrictions ended in February last year. From tomorrow, Lloyds Banking Group will expect its 40,000 staff who would usually work in offices to return for at least two

days a week. It will monitor attendance through the swipe cards used to get in and out of the buildings. HSBC has told 18,500 staff in its UK subsidiary, which includes the branch network, that they must work from offices for three days a week from next month. And from next week the investment giant BlackRock is demanding that its 3,700 London-based staff, as well as others around the world, step up their office attendance from three days a week to four. Citi employs 240,000 people globally, but the British offices are the first where staff have been for-

mally notified that their passes are being monitored. Bloomberg reported they have been told “one swipe, per person, per location will be captured”. Its UK base is in Canary Wharf in London’s Docklands, but the bank also employs 4,000 in Edinburgh and Belfast. Staff who fail to turn up at least three days a week could face financial penalties. A spokesman said: “We have firm expectations for office attendance.” The hybrid working adopted since the pandemic has spawned the term “twats” – office staff only in on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and

Thursdays. Before the pandemic, the term referred to those who were in London on those days and at their country houses for a long weekend, every weekend. Sir Lloyd Dorfman, who made his fortune through the Travelers **READERS’ POLL** Are firms right to force staff into the office with threats of bonus cuts? sundaytimes.co.uk/poll

money-changing business and now invests in office buildings, said: “We need to be careful that we don’t sleepwalk into a permanent four-day weekend.” Many employers are sticking with some form of hybrid working even as they urge staff back to the offices. Andy Jassy, the Amazon chief executive, told staff last month that “it’s probably not going to work out” unless they go to the office for at least three days a week. Goldman Sachs, which employs 6,000 people in London, has demanded that its staff return five days a week, while JP Morgan’s

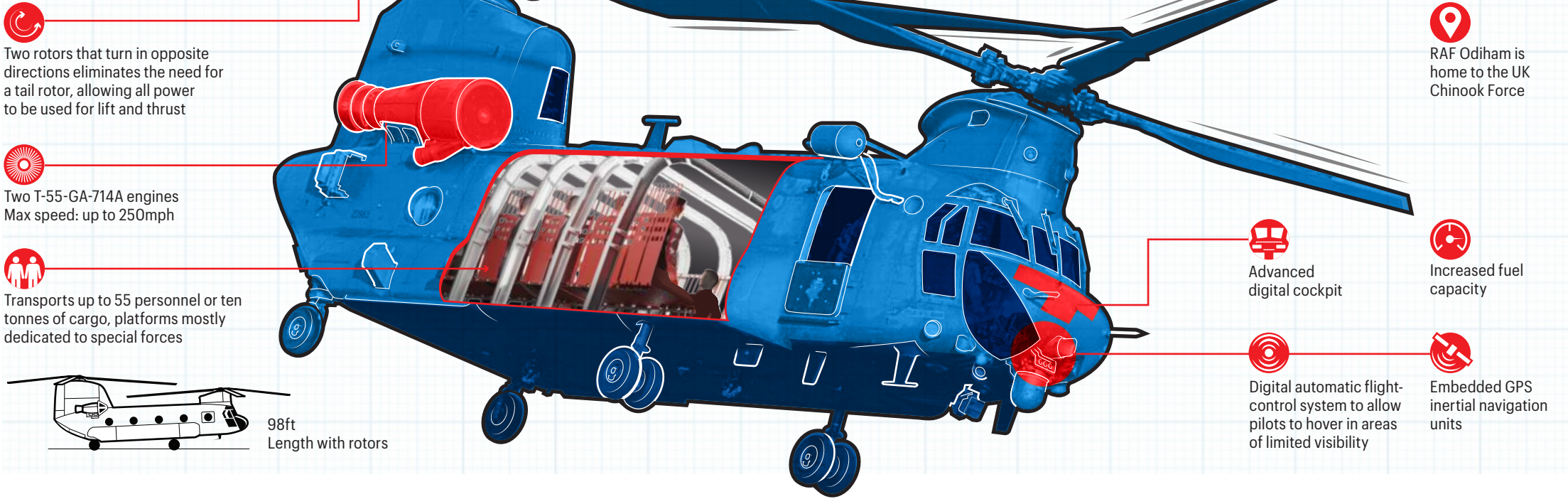
most senior directors must also work in offices for the entire week. HSBC has allowed each division around the world to define what hybrid working means. For example, staff in the UK banking operations were told last month that they should work in offices – or have face-to-face meetings with clients – three days a week. Firms that took a more relaxed approach to working from home as the pandemic eased have also tightened up their policies. Nationwide used to let staff work anywhere, but since last year encourages employees to spend 20 per

cent of their time in offices or working with colleagues, with managers told to do the same for 40 per cent of their hours. Dominic Hook of Unite said it was talking to insurers and banks. “There are increasingly unrealistic and sometimes irrational demands being placed on hardworking staff,” he said.



NEWS

SKY'S THE LIMIT



Michael Clarke

Clattering warhorse the SAS can always rely on

The twin-rotor Chinook helicopter makes a very distinctive noise, caused, say its pilots, by one of its blades hitting the “dirty air” of the other. They clatter along as if there’s something wrong with them. But troops on the ground hearing the approaching clatter know there’s something very right about them. The Chinook is one of the great workhorses of modern military forces; safe, reliable and adaptable to any number of roles. Along with the Lockheed Hercules transporter, Boeing’s Chinook is one of two western aircraft developed in the 1960s still produced and deployed in battle today. Only Boeing’s B-52 nuclear bomber, from the 1950s, exceeds their record.

The CH-47 Chinook had some vocal critics when it was first produced for the US Army in 1962 – not heavy enough to lift the really big stuff, yet too heavy to get assault troops into battle, they said. In fact, the CH-47 hit the sweet spot in between. Chinooks first saw service in the Vietnam war, where they lifted full artillery pieces and their shells on to precipitous mountain tops. They delivered two combat platoons, sometimes three, into small jungle clearings. They helped to recover downed US aircraft, did casualty evacuations and carried every type of payload. Four Chinooks were even adapted as gunships in Vietnam. Known to their pornography-obsessed crews as “Guns-A-Go-Go”, they bristled with weapons.

The Chinook’s original 1957 developers had evidently hit on a fundamentally good design. They produced a helicopter that was large and could be loaded from the sides as well as the big back ramp, and when it was introduced it was faster than even the attack helicopters the US operated. With a maximum speed of 200mph, the standard Chinook remains one of the fastest rotary wing aircraft in the US and is faster than most other military helicopters in the world. It can lift big cargos as high as 18,000ft. No other military helicopter of that size can reach a ceiling like that. It can land in hostile spaces little bigger than itself and carries three machine guns for its own protection when it does.

It isn’t surprising that the basic Chinook model has gone through many upgrades since that 1962 debut. There was a big redesign in 1982 with the D variant. The latest is the CH-47F, which includes engine upgrades and some of the best avionics available within the traditional airframe. After Vietnam, Chinooks became ubiquitous in military operations in the two Gulf wars as well as in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s and in Sierra Leone in 1999. They carried out civilian evacuations in Lebanon and have performed transport duties from Afghanistan to Mali.

For many years that Chinook clatter was also familiar to the citizens of Northern Ireland. Britain has operated the largest Chinook fleet outside the US and in equally diverse roles. The RAF received its first 30 Chinooks in 1978. One of them – ZA718, call sign Bravo November – became famous. Four Chinooks were aboard the Atlantic Conveyor sent to the

“Four British pilots won DFCs flying a single Chinook in its 40-year career

Falklands in 1982. The others went down when the cargo ship was sunk, but Bravo November had the luck to be airborne at the time and made an emergency landing on the Hermes. It was the only utility helicopter British forces had in that war and it worked exceptionally hard – certainly harder than the Argentinian Chinooks.

Designed for a maximum loading of 55 fully equipped troops, Bravo November crammed in more than 80 on a few occasions. It went on to Iraq and Afghanistan and appeared in every major operation the RAF undertook. It was nicknamed “the survivor” for a reason. No fewer than four of its pilots were awarded Distinguished Flying Crosses commanding it. Bravo November was retired to the RAF Museum at Cosford only last year.

More than 1,000 Chinooks operate around the world but a mysterious few are specifically adapted for special forces. And since Britain’s special forces work so closely with their American counterparts, these particular Chinooks, normally designated H-47 (ER), are of more than passing interest.

They are special in many ways. ER denotes a (classified) extended range. Speed is believed to be perhaps 250mph, and height more than 20,000ft. This version includes extensive night-vision ability, the latest in navigation and stealth technologies. They are ideal for letting British special forces slip in and out of dangerous places and keeping them supplied when they are there. Special forces soldiers do not say much to the rest of us, but they love their Chinooks.

As with the new Lockheed F-35 fighter, however, the US will sell the H-47 (ER) Chinook and all its systems but keep control of the most sensitive of its advanced avionics. The customer either has to settle for dependence on the US for the maintenance and replacement of the avionics or try to reproduce them.

One of the implicit drivers in British military policy over the past 60 years has been to remain in step with the US military. Britain operates less than a tenth of America’s force structure but works hard to make it a miniature version of the US military. There is no pretension to be a “pocket superpower”, but Britain’s special forces are one of the few areas where it can claim some genuine military equivalence. That’s why the H-47 (ER) special Chinook is a special sort of problem.

Michael Clarke is visiting professor in defence studies at King’s College London and distinguished fellow at the Royal United Services Institute

Wallace’s ‘threat to cancel US Chinooks’

→ Continued from page 1 £2.3 billion on this will mean we will have less to spend on medium-lift helicopters that will be British-assembled and made,” the source added.

Others in government disagreed. One described the proposal as “mad”. A second said: “It seemed like he was trying to piss off the Americans. That is certainly how some have read it.” Another said the move led to progress on the deal grinding to a halt, adding: “These things are done on a very long programme of activity, so disrupting all that is not cool.”

A source close to Wallace categorically denied that the issue was in any way related to the Nato job, branding any suggested link “pathetic” and pointing out that he had raised the prospect of cancelling the deal two years ago. They added that Wallace’s concerns were based entirely around cost, capability and the actual value of the deal to the UK.

With the US becoming increasingly alarmed, Jane Hartley, the US ambassador to the UK, wrote to No 10 on August 1 to seek clarity on the future of the deal. Downing Street is understood to have tried to provide assurances to Hartley. Separately, Karen Pierce, the British ambassador to the US, is understood to have received representations from Washington. “She was very unhappy,” a source said.

However, on August 10, Wallace went further. In a letter to Lloyd Austin, the US secretary of state for defence, he is said to have made clear that he was considering cancelling the deal. A source said Wallace’s letter was sent despite there being no agreed position in government.

Wallace was replaced as defence secretary last week by Grant Shapps. Sources said the issue would be one of the top items in his in-tray. Sunak is understood to be of the view that Shapps should press ahead with the deal.

Hospitals must track down deaf children wrongly given all-clear

Shaun Lintern Health Editor

Hearing test services for children must be improved urgently as concerns rise that potentially thousands of deaf youngsters have been failed by the NHS.

In June The Sunday Times revealed that an internal NHS report had exposed poor-quality testing at hospitals. Some babies were wrongly given the all-clear. A review of all newborn tests from 2018 to 2023 found that hospitals failed to follow guidelines and carried out inadequate tests or misinterpreted results.

It is feared the problems could stretch across many of the 130 paediatric audiology units in England. Only 25 are accredited to national clinical standards for hearing tests.

NHS England has ordered hospitals to ensure that all children affected are traced and given help. For some it may be too late to have cochlear implants and they could face difficulties for the rest of their lives.

In a letter on Thursday Professor Dame Sue Hill, the chief scientific officer for England, demanded urgent steps to improve services. NHS managers have been told to check staff competencies.

Luna Brewell, three, still struggles to communicate after mistakes were made in her initial screening. Her mother, Natalie Brewell, from St Ives in Cambridgeshire, has received an apology from Hinchingsbrooke Hospital.

She said: “Had Luna got her hearing aids at two months, she could be on par with her peers. The earlier you catch it, the better chance all these deaf children have in socialising, speech and communication.”

Asbestos fears in crumbling buildings

→ Continued from page 1 the mausoleum at the mansion near Oxted, Surrey, where he lived with Wathen, who became his second wife in 1985. He acquired the property in the 1970s. Surrounded by more than 220 acres of land, the property features a pool, tennis court, stables, formal gardens and a helipad. The sprawling estate could be worth as much as £100 million.

The Ritz in Paris is almost certainly the largest asset in Fayed’s estate. He paid about £10 million for the glamorous venue in 1979. After a recent four-year renovation said to have cost at least £200 million, the building should be worth at least £500 million.

question mark about what the scale of this problem is.”

The Labour MP Dame Meg Hillier, chairwoman of the public accounts committee, told Times Radio that simply inspecting potentially affected buildings could cost hundreds of thousands of pounds.

Hillier said that ministers had delayed addressing the problem, telling the BBC: “What we’ve seen for years is cost-shunting of these problems down the line, so there are very big bills to pay now for the taxpayer.”

Schools are expected to have to bid through the Department for Education’s funding process to finance permanent building replacements. The government will fund the cost of remedial work, including temporary buildings.

The Health and Safety Executive published a report in July revealing that it had written to a third of the 421 British schools it inspected in the previous 12 months, warning of “non-compliance” in their legal duty to manage asbestos effectively.

Fayed’s children in line for £1.7bn

→ Continued from page 1 Omar is listed as director of a company associated with his father’s Balnagown Estate in the Highlands. The Scottish retreat, which has 65,000 acres, is a 40-minute drive north of Inverness.

Fayed also had a presence in the tax haven of Bermuda, where he set up a company called AIT Leisure. There were luxury apartments in New York too.

He bought two flats at the Pierre, a hotel on Manhattan’s Upper East Side, a block once home to the Hollywood actress Elizabeth Taylor and the fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent. A three-floor penthouse there sold for \$44 million in 2017.

He almost certainly left behind a big cash pile. Fayed and his family took more than £368 million in dividends from Harrods before selling it in 2010 for £1.5 billion.

He sold Fulham FC for between £150 million and £200 million three years later, having acquired the club in 1997.

Tom Bower on Mohamed Fayed, pages 4-5

MORE SCROLLING FOR YOUR MONEY

NEW SIM PLANS FROM £6. SWIPE, STREAM & SHARE MORE. DON'T PAY MORE.

LESS MALVRKEY MORE SMARTY

SEARCH SMARTY MOBILE

APRIL 2023 Which? Recommended Provider MOBILE PROVIDER

SIM only flexible 1 month plan.

Subscribe to trusted, insightful journalism. Choose from a range of print and digital options thetimes.co.uk/subscribe

TIMES RADIO

10.05am Gareth Davies, the Treasury minister
10.20am Bridget Phillipson, the shadow education secretary
10.40am Jimmy Wales, the founder of Wikipedia
11.05am Luke Johnson, the owner and chairman of the bakery chain Gail's and former boss of Pizzas Express, The Ivy and Patisserie Valerie
6.45pm Roger Allam, the Olivier award-winning actor, on his new play with Sir Ian McKellen, Frank and Percy

Man who advocated sharing Elgin Marbles to take over at British Museum

Liam Kelly
Arts Correspondent

The British Museum will appoint as its interim director a former boss of the Victoria & Albert Museum who has advocated sharing the Elgin Marbles with Greece.

Sir Mark Jones will replace Hartwig Fischer, who quit after thousands of objects were found to have been stolen from the museum's collection.

George Osborne, the museum's chairman, said that Jones, 72, had "received the unanimous approval" of trustees, though his appointment must still be rubber-stamped by the prime minister. The former

chancellor hailed Jones as "one of the most experienced and respected museum leaders in the world" who will "offer the leadership and grip needed right now".

The British Museum was plunged into the worst crisis in its 270-year history last month when it admitted that it had sacked a senior curator of 30 years after it was discovered that about 2,000 gems, jewellery and other treasures had gone missing from its vaults. Peter Higgs was sacked in July after the disappearance of artefacts worth tens of millions of pounds. Higgs, 56, has not commented on the scandal, but his son, Greg, denied he had committed wrongdoing.

Fischer, the German academic who has been director since 2016, will leave because of the scandal, and Jonathan Williams, his deputy, has "stepped back" after a whistleblower said his concerns were "fobbed off" more than two years ago.

Jones is a museum veteran, the founding director of National Museums Scotland and chairman of the National Trust for Scotland. While running the V&A, Jones advocated for Britain and Greece sharing the Parthenon sculptures, which were removed from the Athens landmark by Lord Elgin between 1801 and 1805. The British Museum's trustees have long said they would

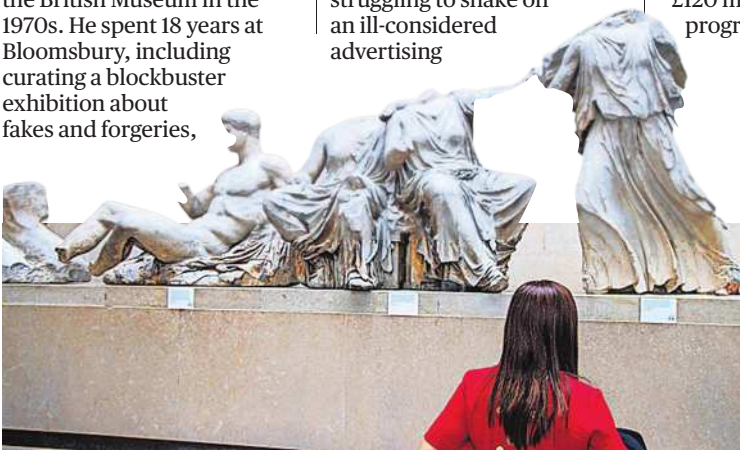
consider any requests for a loan. Successive Greek governments, however, have refused to acknowledge British ownership and demanded they be returned.

"There must be a possibility that something could now work for all parties," Jones told The Observer in 2002.

It is a view that chimes with those held by Osborne, 52, who has been locked in talks with Greek officials over a "Parthenon partnership" that could see some of the sculptures displayed in Athens, while never-before-seen treasures are lent to the British Museum. There were rumours that Osborne and Fischer did not see eye-to-eye

about the marbles.

The Old Etonian son of a diplomat, Jones studied at Oxford and the Courtauld Institute of Art before joining the British Museum in the 1970s. He spent 18 years at Bloomsbury, including curating a blockbuster exhibition about fakes and forgeries,



Mark Jones once said Greece could share the Parthenon treasures

before moving to Scotland in 1992.

Jones took the helm at the V&A in 2001 when the institution was in crisis, struggling to shake off an ill-considered advertising

campaign that billed it as a "café with a nice museum attached" and facing falling visitor numbers. He scrapped the £5 entry fee, undertook a £120 million renovation programme and

transformed what was seen as a dusty repository of porcelain and antique lace into a dynamic museum of design. He was knighted in the 2010 new year's honours list.

Sources said Jones was the only plausible candidate to take the reins from Fischer, 60. Fischer, who was paid £305,000 last year, and Williams were seen as tainted figures, while Christopher Yates, another deputy, is responsible for security and would have raised eyebrows if he did get the top job.

A museum source said: "It's a real coup for the trustees to have landed the most experienced museum leader of this generation."

Hairdressing on the high street is for the chop



Enterprising stylists hammered by Covid are swapping shops for high-end trailers and living rooms and using apps to find clients

Louise Eccles Consumer Affairs Editor

When the celebrity hair stylist Timothy David decided to open his own salon after years of working on film sets, he did not consider renting a space on the high street.

Instead, David, who styles the hair of the *Sex Education* actress Gillian Anderson, renovated a silver 1969 Airstream trailer, parked it on a west London residential development and created a homely environment with bookshelves and plants. Customers can order gin and tonics, pizza and burritos to be delivered while they have their hair cut.

David, 33, is one of thousands of stylists who are moving to mobile hairdressing or more intimate salon set-ups in converted garden sheds, lofts and even dining rooms. The number of hair salons fell by 527 last year, the biggest drop in ten years.

There are 17,517 high street hair salons, which is 1,500 fewer than a decade ago. The industry said hairdressers were being forced to close due to debts acquired while they were closed during the pandemic, high energy bills, taxes and the cost of living crisis, which has meant customers visiting less frequently.

A survey in January by the National Hair and Beauty Federation found almost half (49 per cent) of salons were unsure whether their businesses would survive past the end of the financial year.

Instagram is filled with pictures of stylists who have created idyllic cabins at the end of their gardens in Harrogate in North Yorkshire, Wellington in Shropshire, Fleet in Hampshire and elsewhere.

The hyper-local model of mini-salons appeals particularly to home workers who want to squeeze in midweek haircuts with a laptop on their knees. David said: "Salon culture can be very restrictive where we work. We need a sense of freedom creatively. We work."

Lucy Stainton, commercial director

for the Local Data Company, which collated the industry figures, said the "twin challenge" of lower revenues and higher costs had led many to set up away from fixed salons, "in order to offer more affordable services at higher margins".

Thousands of stylists have left the industry, with the Covid-19 lockdowns forcing many to find alternative careers. The number of stylists has fallen by 26,000 since 2015, to fewer than 160,000. Salon owners say they are also struggling to recruit senior stylists because the flexibility of homeworking is more tempting. In 2021, 64 per cent of hairdressers were employed compared with just 39 per cent in 2006.

Cally Borg, who has previously worked in salons, converted the dining room of her five-bedroom detached house in Reigate, Surrey, into a full hair salon in 2019, so she could work more flexibly around her 11-year-old daughter and three stepchildren.

She said: "When I worked in a salon the hours were too long (9am-8pm), the pay was terrible and there wasn't enough flexibility around the children.

"Now I work four days a week and I don't work any evenings and weekends. I am finished by 5pm for when the kids have their dinner. In the summer holidays I do a few hours when I need to while the children are in the garden."

Borg, who charges £69.50 for a haircut and has styled the hair of Amber Le Bon, Billie Piper and Amanda Holden, said the perception that home haircuts were cut-price or lower quality was disappearing. By having a home salon, Borg does not have to pay business rates or rent but is VAT-registered because she earns more than £85,000 a year.

However, a rising number of hair businesses are not registering to pay VAT.

This could be because profit margins are tighter as costs rise and customer

Cally Borg has converted her dining room into a salon, while Timothy David works from a renovated trailer



Drop in the number of stylists since 2015, exacerbated by lockdown

26,000

numbers fall, meaning they fall beneath the threshold, but many salon owners have their own theories.

"It is tax avoidance," said Toby Dicker, co-founder of the Salon Employers Association and who owns salons in Kent.

The Salon Employers Association says the 20 per cent VAT rate is encouraging people not to declare their full earnings. The association has called for VAT on hair services to be reduced to 10 per cent and for the threshold to be reduced to about £35,000, meaning all but the smallest businesses must register.

Amanda Lodge-Stewart, president of the National Hair and Beauty Federation and the owner of a hair salon in Huddersfield, said: "I have been trying to recruit now for ages and I cannot get anyone in my salon because everyone wants to be self-employed."

Dicker said the growing model for stylists to rent chairs from salons, rather than be employed by them, meant salons were becoming "glorified landlords" and not helping to hire the next generation of apprentices and trainees.

A decline in training and apprenticeships could exacerbate the skills shortage in the sector. A report by the National Hair and Beauty Federation last year found that 57 per cent of hair and beauty businesses had unfilled vacancies. The average salary for stylist jobs advertised on the recruitment site Indeed is £24,295.

Sheila Abrahams, director of the Freelance Hairdressers' Association, said the pandemic meant stylists "had the time to create a beautiful space at home" and go self-employed.

Millie Kendall, chief executive of the British Beauty Council, said the rise of apps, which enable people to book stylists to come to their homes, had also made it easier. Kendall, who uses apps such as Ruuby, said: "If you're on five or six apps you can be busy all day long."

Editorial, page 20

Mud traps revellers at desert festival

David Charter
US Editor

Heavy rain reduced the annual Burning Man festival to a fizzle yesterday, with attendees advised to "shelter in place" and conserve food and water as the vast site in Nevada's Black Rock desert turned to sludge.

More than 70,000 attendees, or "Burners", found themselves trapped in the temporary city that springs up every year for a celebration of self-expression and self-reliance. It was unclear whether last night's ceremonial burning of a large wooden effigy would go ahead as planned, nor when Burners would be able to leave, with more rain forecast.

The conditions triggered comparisons to the 2017 Fyre Festival, an ill-fated party in the Bahamas that was an expensive wash-out.

Burning Man was founded in San Francisco in 1986 before becoming established as a week-long event in the desert 100 miles north of Reno. Burners must bring everything they need for the festival and help clean up completely before leaving.

"The gate and airport in and out of Black Rock City remain closed," the event's organisers tweeted yesterday, although it is not certain many attendees saw the post because mobile coverage at the site is limited.

Reports emerged of the normally rock-hard desert floor turning to mush, making the temporary roads difficult to navigate and leaving organisers unable to empty the portable toilets.

The event is already known for its tough conditions, with temperatures usually sweltering during the day and cool at night. Most festivalgoers drive to the remote site.

The Reno Gazette Journal reported yesterday: "Dawn brought a growing realisation for attendees that they might not be going home as planned."

The US National Weather Service also warned of the danger of flash floods over large parts of Nevada.

The Bureau of Land Management issued a statement saying that there would be no more entry to this year's Burning Man: "Officials have closed ingress to the Burning Man event effective immediately and for the remainder of the event. Participants inbound for the event should turn around and head home."

Kuenssberg counts cost of podcast boom as ratings slide for TV politics

Liam Kelly
Arts Correspondent

Laura Kuenssberg's big moment was overshadowed by a comedian.

When she presented her first Sunday morning politics programme on the BBC last September, Kuenssberg, its former political editor, landed interviews with Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak.

But Joe Lycett, a guest on the programme, sarcastically applauded Truss at the end of her interview. Kuenssberg looked awkward, saying: "There's a serious point here." Things have not got much better for *Sunday with*

Laura Kuenssberg since that maiden voyage, which led to 144 complaints about bias against Truss.

The number of live viewers has declined by more than a third since she replaced Andrew Marr, who left to join LBC as a presenter and become the New Statesman's political editor.

During his 16 years at the show, Marr pulled in an average of 1.9 million viewers each episode. For the final months of last year, Kuenssberg, 47, was getting audiences of 1.5 million. That has dropped this year to 1.2 million every week, according to Barb. Her latest

series starts this morning with Jeremy Hunt, the chancellor, as the star guest.

Numerous current and former BBC news presenters said that Kuenssberg's problem was that she did not have the "warmth" of Marr, 64, or his predecessor, Sir David Frost – people just as comfortable interviewing rock stars and artists as they were politicians.

Barney Jones, the veteran executive who edited *Breakfast with Frost* and *The Andrew Marr Show*, said that while Kuenssberg is a "terrific journalist ... maybe she doesn't have natural 'come on in' warmth".

Some of Kuenssberg's changes to the format have been derided. The set is the same used for news bulletins, but with pencil drawings of Westminster in the background. "It just looks like a posh programme on the news channel," said a former presenter.

Her defenders point out that Marr's final years were dominated by huge news stories, such as the pandemic and the parties scandal, and that her predecessors took time to find their rhythm.

The BBC said that when including those who watch on other devices or catch up on iPlayer, Kuenssberg's average



Laura Kuenssberg's show faces new competition

is more like 1.5 million each week. "We're very pleased it's become the weekend's agenda-setting programme," a spokeswoman said.

Another challenge is the fact that Sunday mornings have in effect become part of the ministerial broadcast round, with one government figure popping up on numerous outlets.

"In my day I could say, 'I'm sorry, but if you want to do other shows that morning I won't have you on.' I did not want to be part of a conveyor belt," said Jones, who now lectures in journalism at City, University of London. "Now it's exactly the opposite."

The surge in popularity of podcasts, such as *The Rest is Politics*, presented by Rory Stewart and Alastair Campbell, and *The News Agents*, with the BBC alumni Jon Sopel and Emily Maitlis, means there are more ways than ever for audiences to get their fill of political insight.

Kuenssberg is no stranger to podcasts, and this weekend starts the BBC's *Newscast* with Paddy O'Connell, at the instigation of John McAndrew, the former GB News executive who joined the BBC last year. "She's just been given the weekend podcast gig and she's great at that," said one

BBC presenter. "BBC bosses are obsessed with podcasts above all else."

Kuenssberg also faces new competition. Sir Trevor Phillips, the Times columnist and former chairman of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, is taking over Sky News's Sunday morning programme. Phillips, 69, said he would not be a "neutral platonic presence" because viewers "know we're human beings and we should not pretend not to be".

Sunday Morning with Trevor Phillips, which starts at 8.30am today, is part of what media sources say is "a huge effort" to battle the BBC.



Wealthy, flamboyant, deceitful, he

Mohamed Fayed, who has died aged 94, never lost his street-urchin cunning. His biographer *Tom Bower* reflects on a life punctuated by scandal, generosity and personal tragedy



Thirty-one hours after the death of Diana, Princess of Wales on August 31, 1997, I was flying on Mohamed Fayed's helicopter from Battersea in London to land by the Eiffel Tower in Paris. Traveling with me at 6.30am on that grim morning was Fayed's chief of security, a pathologist and a silent American lawyer. At 9am I was in the Ritz hotel, owned by Fayed, interviewing the staff who had cared for Diana and his son Dodi during their brief stay before their fatal drive towards the family's private flat off the Champs-Élysées. Sitting in the Ritz bar with Kes Wingfield, Dodi Fayed's bodyguard, who had been sent outside the hotel to distract the hordes of paparazzi, it was immediately clear that Henri Paul, the couple's chauffeur, had been drinking heavily in the same bar before he got behind the wheel. By nightfall, after interviewing six staff who had cared for the couple in the Imperial suite, it was clear that Mohamed Fayed was behind the plan to dash back to the Champs-Élysées after midnight in a hired Mercedes. To my surprise, John Macnamara,

Fayed's head of security – who died in 2019 – had bugged my interviews. He was furious with what he heard. By then, Macnamara knew, Fayed was taking no responsibility for Diana's death. Having orchestrated the romance between his son and the princess in the south of France, he was already contriving the fantasy that their deaths were plotted by Prince Philip and MI6 to prevent his Muslim son marrying "pregnant" Diana. That night I sat in the Champs-Élysées flat with Rene Delorm, Dodi's valet. Delorm had witnessed the romance on Fayed's yacht, bought specially to seduce the princess. By daybreak I realised that Fayed was not the flamboyant cuddly owner of Harrods many had assumed but someone far more devious, who had rightly been denied a British passport. After my return to London I witnessed how this fantasist and bizarre businessman bought protection by hiring armed bodyguards and corrupting police officers. Fayed's ruthless operation earned him a vast fortune and the destruction of many innocent reputations. But, extra-

ordinarily, he had inveigled himself not only into the orbit of Diana but also the Queen, Prince Philip and many MPs. The passport to his fame and wealth was his ownership of Harrods. But it was the purchase of the store in 1985 that threw his crooked career from the shadows into the spotlight. Until he double-crossed the tycoon Tiny Rowland to buy Harrods, Fayed was unknown in London. Rowland, who died in 1998, was incensed by the Egyptian's brazen coup in snatching the prize he had long sought and invested millions of pounds in destroying Fayed's reputation. Fayed had only been allowed to buy Harrods by the British government after City bankers backed his claim to be the son of a rich pasha who owned cotton-rich estates across Egypt and a fleet of tankers. In reality, he was the son of a school inspector who started out selling Coca-Cola on Alexandria's main roads amid the car fumes. Three men helped Fayed transform himself from street urchin to billionaire: his father-in-law, Muhammad Khashoggi; Mahdi al-Tajir, Dubai's ambassador in London; and the Sultan of Brunei.

Khashoggi was an ordinary vet who lied about his qualifications to become the personal doctor of Saudi Arabia's king. In the early 1950s Fayed met Khashoggi's son Adnan in Alexandria and with persistence and charm became Muhammad Khashoggi's assistant in Riyadh. Fayed learnt from the vet that the bigger the lie the more likely the perpetrator could convince unsuspecting honest Europeans of a fantasy and become rich. On his return to Egypt Fayed married Khashoggi's daughter Samira and they had a son, Dodi. But within months Fayed had flitted to Geneva, where he tried to build his fortune as a ship owner. The business failed and to escape his creditors he headed to Haiti in the late 1950s. Forty years later, Adnan Khashoggi, by then well known as an arms dealer and bon viveur, met me at the Connaught hotel for lunch to help my research for a biography I was writing about Fayed. Outraged at how Fayed had abandoned Dodi in Alexandria, Khashoggi told me: "Fayed is an unbelievable criminal and liar." He added: "Be careful. He's dangerous." In Haiti, cosying up to the daughter of



holiday for your money

15 night Caribbean
Transatlantic holiday from
£1,099 pp[†]

Hurry! Ends
4 September

Based on Early Saver cruise K506A
Pay monthly at no extra cost[‡]

POCRUISES.COM | VISIT A TRAVEL AGENT



NICK RAY, THE FINCHER FILES/POPPERFOTO, TIM GRAHAM/IAN WALTON/GETTY IMAGES, RUSSELL BOYCE/REUTERS

left no part of society untouched

the murderous dictator François “Papa Doc” Duvalier, Fayed got concessions and money to develop the port and oil wells. He was exposed as a fraudster within a year. To save his life he fled overnight to London – but always feared that he would be murdered by Duvalier.

In London in the early 1960s Fayed posed as a rich playboy. Among his successful targets was Dubai’s ambassador, Tajir. Through Costain, a small British construction company that Fayed part-owned, the ambassador offered Dubai’s ruler, Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed al-Maktoum, the chance to build the desert kingdom’s first hospital, concrete runway, tarred roads and port. Secretly, Fayed pocketed a chunk of every contract.

With real wealth for the first time, Fayed griped about the need for a visa on his Egyptian passport each time he entered Britain.

In Dubai, Tajir told me what then happened. “We were sitting in my kitchen, and I agreed to give Mohamed a Dubai diplomatic passport. I asked him for his name. He replied, ‘Al Fayed’ – adding the Al to make him sound more important. I asked him his age, and he cut it by five years.” Fayed’s fantasy of being the son of a rich pasha was born.

Macnamara, a former Scotland Yard chief superintendent, was Fayed’s hatchet man. He was responsible for destroying the careers of Harrods employees falsely accused of shoplifting, blackmailing young girls whom Fayed had allegedly sexually abused to withhold charges, paying bribes to police officers, and bugging and burgling his way across Europe to prove that Fayed’s honest critics were criminals.

Meeting Fayed’s victims for my book *Fayed, the Unauthorized Biography*, published in 1998, was harrowing. Decent men and women described lives wrecked when Fayed felt the need to vent his spleen. Corruption within the Metropolitan Police meant that the force failed to provide protection – or to prosecute Fayed. With Macnamara’s help, I saw how he ran rings around the government. Never more so than after he bought Harrods.

The Sultan of Brunei was Fayed’s ally. Through charm and skill, Fayed persuaded the sultan to finance his purchase of Harrods for about £600 million. The loan was eventually repaid.

The Knightsbridge store was Fayed’s



“**Diana was pushed into his grasp**”

calling card to meet Britain’s establishment, finance some of the royal family’s pet causes and eventually persuade Diana to meet Dodi.

By holding royal warrants and financing the Royal Windsor Horse Show, one of the late Queen’s favourite events, Fayed posed as a loyal subject. He also offered Raine, Countess Spencer – Diana’s stepmother – a job on the Harrods board and bought not only the exiled Duke of Windsor’s house in Paris but also all his belongings at auction in Geneva. This, Fayed hoped, would ingratiate him with the royal family. Although he half succeeded, he became the agent of their destruction – not least because he was denied a British passport.

With blazing eyes and unhinged anger, Fayed told me about the injustice of that bureaucratic refusal. Partly, he was denied a passport because American and British intelligence reports had taken note of his dishonesty. But Tiny Rowland’s 13-year campaign, upheld by a Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) investigation into Fayed’s past, destroyed his credibility.

With mesmeric ardour, Fayed sought to disprove the DTI report. Convinced – without foundation – that Michael Howard, then a junior DTI minister, had been bribed by Rowland to commission the report, he bribed three Tory MPs to ask questions in support of his quest.

One was Neil Hamilton, who made the mistake of denying that he had been offered any money. A furious Fayed exposed the lie in fury that he had not got what he paid for – and Hamilton’s career was destroyed.

It seemed that everyone – including me – was offered a bribe by Fayed. Most – including me – turned it down. If only Hamilton had said that Fayed did offer him money but he rejected it, he might have survived.

The Tory minister Jonathan Aitken went the same way. Fayed told *The Guardian* that Aitken

had not paid his bill while staying at the Ritz in Paris. Foolishly, Aitken denied it and was subsequently imprisoned for perjury.

Fayed’s “cash for questions” scandal tarnished John Major in the 1990s as the prime minister presiding over a government of “sleaze”.

By then, Fayed’s life was staggeringly opulent. Living in Park Lane in Mayfair, he owned estates in Surrey and Scotland, a home in Switzerland and a villa in St Tropez. Commuting between them on jets and helicopters, he often abandoned his Finnish wife Heini and their four children while he travelled the globe seeking business deals and women. In Surrey, to prove he was an Arab, he often spent the day in a large tent on his lawn.

In Fayed’s world, money bought acceptance, access and accolades. He was cheered by Fulham football fans at their Craven Cottage ground in west London when he pledged to restore the club’s fortunes as the new owner. Like a pharaoh, Fayed loved to walk across the pitch, encouraging the adulation.

The 7½ft statue of his pop megastar friend Michael Jackson that he had installed outside the gates was greeted with derision by fans and the next owner took it down a decade ago. (Fayed blamed its removal for the club’s relegation from the Premier League a year later.)

Powerfully seductive, Fayed exploited Diana’s vulnerability in the summer of 1997. Alone, seeking a holiday retreat for her two sons, Diana was pushed by her unconcerned family into Fayed’s grasp.

In the period when Diana was twice Fayed’s guest in the south of France, I regularly visited the plotter in his fifth-floor office in Harrods. Gleefully, he showed me the colour photographs of the princess enjoying herself with Dodi. In those unrestrained moments, he revealed how he had rapidly bought a yacht suitable for his son’s seduction of her. Was he hoping for more from his investment?

Adnan Khashoggi later told me at the Connaught that father and son often shared women. Especially after Fayed’s successful financing of the hit film *Chariots of Fire*, they had both made use of the casting couch.

In the days before she died, just why Diana and the royal family trusted Fayed was puzzling. In the aftermath, it was even more bewildering that the royal

From far left, Fayed at Harrods, hobnobbing with Charles and the Queen, outside Fulham FC and at the funeral of Diana, who was killed with his son Dodi, left

family, Whitehall and Westminster tolerated Fayed’s outrageous assertions about hearing Diana’s last words in the hospital that she was pregnant and that she intended to marry Dodi.

French doctors denied Fayed’s claims and the Repossi jeweller who brought a selection of rings to the Ritz for Dodi told me two days after the crash that Dodi chose one from his Forget Me Not range – definitely not an engagement ring.

Yet Fayed’s dishonest campaign suggesting a conspiracy to cause the fatal crash was embraced by many, and – in a damaging blow for Britain – was believed across the Arab world. No one stepped up to expose Fayed’s fundamental dishonesty, to explain his calculated distortion of the truth.

In a nutshell, there could not have been a conspiracy to cause the death of Diana and Dodi because no one other than the drunken, speeding driver, Henri Paul, and Mohamed Fayed knew that the couple would be driving through the Alma tunnel from the Ritz to the Champs-Élysées.

Nonetheless, for ten years after their deaths, Fayed was allowed to peddle his lies without real challenge. At the eventual inquiry, Fayed failed to produce a scintilla of evidence proving that conspirators had caused the crash. And then he was allowed to walk away without reprimand.

Soon after Diana’s death, I had rejected Fayed’s £400,000 offer to write his authorised biography. When my critical biography revealing his sins and crimes came out a short time later, Fayed was outraged. We met several times subsequently – not least in the courtroom where he and Hamilton were battling a libel case.

Fayed’s smirk in my direction as he left the court remains an ingrained memory. His performance as a witness was brilliant. As a showman and actor, Fayed was unbeatable. Hamilton lost.

Fayed suffered one punishment: none of his children was competent to manage Harrods, which he had transformed into a stunning store and must-see tourist attraction. As he aged, he had to sell it to Qataris.

His other punishment was the death of his son Dodi, and a dream. On several occasions I saw and heard Fayed mourn. But his tears, I believe, were shed for himself.



The cash for questions scandal ended the political careers of Neil Hamilton, top, with wife Christine, and Jonathan Aitken

Jeff Randall

Ringmaster of skulduggery who pioneered fake news



Financial journalists in the late 1980s and early 1990s were blessed with a series of corporate battles that lifted business on to the front page from its traditional position at the back of the newspaper.

Boardrooms, once regarded as the preserve of dull industrialists and their tedious bean counters, became the stage on which monolithic egos, armed with other people’s money, engaged in pitiless combat.

As City editor of *The Sunday Times* for six years, I had a front-row seat as Lord Hanson tried to take over ICI, Sir Jimmy Goldsmith attempted to break up BAT Industries and Rupert Murdoch and Robert Maxwell went toe to toe in the fight for supremacy between *The Sun* and the *Daily Mirror*.

These were delicious encounters from which even the most obtuse reporter could find a line or two to keep happy a demanding news desk.

Yet none came close to matching the entertainment value of the eight-year cage fight between Mohamed Al Fayed and Tiny Rowland for control of Harrods, the Edwardian emporium in Knightsbridge in central London.

It was a tale of treachery, corruption and sophistry that sucked in government ministers and destroyed the careers of

two Tory MPs, Tim Smith and Neil Hamilton, who allegedly accepted bricks of cash to ask questions in the House of Commons on Fayed’s behalf.

Its dramatis personae were mainly characters that no scriptwriter would dare make up, including, my favourite, the Swami – the vernal Indian guru Chandraswami who, for a time, was the spiritual adviser of Adnan Khashoggi, the Saudi arms dealer, whose sister, Samira, was briefly married to Fayed.

It was alleged that the Swami secretly taped conversations between himself and Fayed for which Rowland later paid \$2 million in order to embarrass his adversary, whom he called “Tootsie”.

By the time I joined *The Sunday Times* in 1988, the battle for Harrods was well under way. Fayed had bought the store in 1985, infuriating his old sparring partner, Rowland, who had been plotting to acquire it for his company, Lonrho. Rowland then embarked on a remorseless crusade, often using *The Observer*, owned by Lonrho, to portray Fayed as a fraudulent charlatan who, far from being fabulously wealthy, had borrowed £615 million from the Sultan of Brunei to buy Harrods.

This became a soap opera beyond the wildest dreams of an inexperienced City editor (I was 34) who was expected by his boss, Andrew Neil, the editor, to

deliver weekly front-page scoops. Just when my news list was looking bleak, up would pop fresh revelations of skulduggery from one side or the other.

Getting up close and personal with Fayed and Rowland proved to be quite a challenge.

Fayed was invariably accompanied by his “minder”, Harrods’s impossibly suave public affairs director Michael Cole, a former BBC royal correspondent whose cultivated emollient contrasted sharply with Fayed’s predilection for outrageous abuse embroidered with profanities.

Rowland was even trickier. He rarely spoke in public and almost never to journalists. He left that to his general factotum, Paul Spicer, a Lonrho director who, in my experience, had the mindset of a North Korean border guard but without the charm. I half-suspected he would wipe clean the telephone after talking to me.

My task of becoming Fayed’s journalist of choice was made almost impossible after Neil escalated a row with him over *The Sunday Times*’s coverage of the Harrods affair by banning the store from advertising in the paper, even though it was spending £3 million a year with us.

That spat was eventually settled and I did dine with Fayed at Harrods. It was an

Fayed the showman poses as a Harrods doorman



amusing occasion and the food was spectacular but I never found favour with the Egyptian.

By contrast, I managed to break through the cordon sanitaire around Rowland and joined him for a private lunch, just the two of us, at his preferred table at Claridge’s, opposite the spot occupied that day by Dame Barbara Cartland, the prolific romantic novelist. It felt quite surreal.

Rowland was dazzling: immaculately attired, impeccable manners, but he was also icy cold with a whiff of menace. He addressed me as “Mr Randall” and was surprisingly indiscreet but not in a careless way. He knew precisely what he was telling me and why. He called Fayed “not larger than life, lower than life”.

Long before the struggle for Harrods, Rowland had been branded the “unacceptable face of capitalism” by the then prime minister, Ted Heath, after an unedifying bust-up in Lonrho’s boardroom. That epithet stuck and hung round Tiny’s neck for the rest of his days.

It was, however, only a minor insult compared with the opprobrium heaped on Fayed by a Department of Trade and Industry report into his takeover of Harrods, a copy of which was stolen, passed to Rowland for a reputed fee of £1 million and published by *The*

Observer in a special midweek edition in March 1989.

Under the headline “The Phoney Pharaoh”, the paper, led by its editor, Donald Trefford, and City editor, Melvyn Marcus, set out in lurid detail the damning findings of the inspectors, a leading accountant and senior barrister, who concluded that Fayed was a brazen chancer.

The government was furious, produced an injunction and ordered all copies to be withdrawn and pulped. But it was too late. I bought one for 25p from a street vendor on Park Lane in London and still have it.

Rarely in business has there been a greater demolition of one man’s character and reputation by an official body. The killer punchline was: “The lies of Mohamed Fayed and his success gagging the press created a new fact: that lies were the truth and the truth was a lie.”

Fayed did have a relationship with the truth but it was as a second cousin twice removed. Long before Donald Trump made the phrase popular, the Egyptian shopkeeper was a pioneer of fake news.

Jeff Randall was City editor of The Sunday Times, 1989-95. He is now chairman of Woburn Partners, a communications company

**Harry Yorke and
Kate McCann**

Hundreds of additional caseworkers have been hired and interview times have been slashed from up to seven hours to as little as 45 minutes.

However, concerns are growing that a rapid increase in the number of migrants being released from hotels will overwhelm local authorities, which have warned the government that they lack the capacity to house them. Some councils are considering using public

The asylum backlog refers to the number of people who are seeking asylum in the UK and awaiting a decision on their case. At the end of last year there were more than 132,000 applications in the system, comprising 161,000 people.

After months of sluggish progress, government sources say that processing has accelerated rapidly, with more than 10,000 initial decisions made between mid-July and the end of August.

As recently as the end of June the Home Office was struggling to process more than 1,000 people a week, but it has now doubled this number, with 2,093 initial

This rate is expected to double again by September, with more than 4,000 initial decisions due to be reached each week until Christmas thanks to a streamlined process under which interviews are not necessary for those arriving from six countries where approval rates for granting asylum are high.

These are Afghanistan, Eritrea, Libya, Syria and Yemen and certain claims from Sudan, although a Home Office document published last month states that “omitting personal interviews is not limited to the nationalities noted in the high-grant countries section”.

The document, designed for immigration caseworkers, also sets out how shorter interviews should be conducted where necessary, and adds: "The Home Office will continue to consider

A group of migrants crossing the Channel in a

small boat on Tuesday, heading towards Dover on the Kent coast

A source said that all asylum seekers were subjected to at least one initial screening interview when they first entered the system.

Insiders said the improvements had also been driven by changes made by Robert Jenrick, the immigration minister, which include doubling the number of caseworkers to 2,500, as well as new financial incentives and performance targets for staff and the use of more automation.

“Productivity is rising to where it should be, the number of decision-makers is what it should be, and we are rock solid to clear the legacy backlog as promised,” a source said.

But there are fears that this rapid increase in the number of people granted the right to live and work in the UK will push many councils, which

Councils are already under pressure to house people who have been granted the right to live and work in the UK following a pledge to process all outstanding applications from Afghan nationals in government accommodation by the end of last month.

As of last week, 22 per cent of Afghan nationals who were previously in bridging accommodation had already presented themselves as homeless to councils, according to a Local Government Association survey of 22 local authorities.

One source, responsible for homelessness within a large council, said: "We already have a deficit on accommodation places, and we're now set to have hundreds more people needing somewhere to go. The authority is close to declaring an emergency."

The council is looking at purchasing temporary accommodation and using public buildings such as leisure centres as a last resort.

There are also concerns about the number of Ukrainian nationals needing help, having arrived in the UK as part of a scheme under which people offered their spare rooms but only had to pledge to help for “at least six months”.

A senior local government source said that vulnerable families were being left in unacceptable conditions and warned of health risks associated with cramped and unsuitable accommodation

that councils are being forced to offer.

Local authority leaders have warned the Home Office that they are unable to cope with the numbers needing housing, with pressure growing particularly in areas where “bridging accommodation” hotels are located.

Shaun Davies, a councillor and chairman of the Local Government Association, told Times Radio that councils had “a proud history” of supporting humanitarian efforts and protecting and supporting refugees.

“However, combined pressures from these many schemes are growing on councils and there continues to be a crisis across the refugee and asylum system,” he said. “We need a joined-up approach across central and local government to the cumulative pressures on local services from all asylum and resettlement programmes.

“This needs to include urgent solutions to our pressing housing needs in the short and the long term across all the schemes that welcome new arrivals to the UK.”

The Home Office said: “We are committed to clearing the backlog of legacy asylum cases by the end of the year and have already cut this by a nearly a third since the start of December.

“As the public expect, we continue to have robust safeguards and checks in place to make sure asylum claims are properly considered, decisions are sound, and that protection is granted to those who genuinely need it.”

Harry Yorke
Deputy Political Editor

Michael Gove suggested yesterday that the chancellor should look at shifting some of the taxation burden away from income and onto wealth.

The levelling-up secretary said wealth inequality in Britain has “worsened”, even though disparities in income have remained broadly the same in recent years.

Appearing at an event hosted by the Financial Times in London, Gove said: "I worry that in a number of areas the structure of our society means that the concentrated influence of 'those who have' sometimes acts as a block on the aspirations and opportunities of 'those who aspire'."

“Taking two steps back, one of the big gear changes over the past however many years has been not that income inequality has worsened . . . it’s wealth inequality that’s worsened.”

He said he believed the government needed to look at those operating in a “rentier fashion” – that is, people living on income from property or investments.

Gove, 56, who has two children aged 18 and 20, also raised concerns that the government was still not doing enough to help young people, citing the affordability and supply of housing. The average price of a property dropped by

5.3 per cent over the last year to £260,000 in the year to August, according to the Nationwide's property price index, but in some parts of the country a two-bedroom flat now costs £500,000 – while older generations are living in four-bedroom homes they bought at a fraction of that price.

Asked how the government could address these structural problems, Gove said: "One of the questions in my mind is how do we make sure that we reward opportunity, aspiration and creativity, and then find a way of extracting what we need for public services from those who operate in a rentier fashion."

His comments are likely to be interpreted as advocating greater taxation on wealth, a position more likely to be shared by figures on the Labour left than in the Conservative Party.

Gove later appeared to suggest that he was referring mainly to property wealth, citing Switzerland and Singapore as countries with “significant tax takes from overseas property owners”.

Prior to the last budget, ministers had been looking at a levy on overseas investors buying UK homes. Gove said: "I don't think it's a sin against the free market to think about whether or not we might consider other ways of better regulating overseas investment in the property market."

**MARELLA
CRUISES**

Wanderlust list. Ticked.

Live Happy in legendary locations like Singapore and Santorini. Plus, **SAVE £300 PER BOOKING.***



 ABTA
Travel with confidence

*Use code CRUISE300 to save an extra £300 on booking on itineraries departing between 1st November 2023 and 31st December 2024. Offer excludes any sailings shorter than seven night duration. Offer must be selected at time of booking and applies to new bookings only. Offer is valid from 21st August 2023 to 02nd October 2023. For the code CRUISE300 in upper case when on the holiday payment page of our website. The offer is subject to availability and may be amended or withdrawn at any time without notice. This promotional code is non-transferable and not valid in conjunction with any other discount code. Please see www.tui.co.uk/cruise or the relevant brochure for full booking terms and conditions that apply. Some of the flights and flight-inclusive holidays are financially protected by the ATOL scheme. But ATOL protection does not apply to all holiday and travel services listed that we offer. Our website and brochures will provide you with information on the protection that applies in the case of each holiday and travel service offered before you make your booking. If you do not receive an ATOL Certificate then the booking will not be ATOL protected. If you do receive an ATOL Certificate but all the parts of your trip are not listed on it, those parts will not be ATOL protected. Please see our booking conditions for information or for more information about financial protection and the ATOL Certificate go to www.caa.co.uk. Marella Cruises Limited are members of TUI Group. Registered Office: Wigmore House, Wigmore Lane, Luton, LU1 9TN. Registered in England, for Marella Cruises Limited No: 12562788. ABTA No: 76722 and ATOL No: 11878.



Tim Shipman and Harry Yorke

Ignoring schools and small boats, Sunak and Starmer are focused on the looming election

When Rishi Sunak lands in India at the end of the week, where he will attend the G20 meeting of world leaders, aides expect Britain’s first prime minister of Asian heritage to get a warm welcome.

“There are places where there are pictures of Rishi up in the streets,” one aide said. “It’s a big deal for them.” Some sources whisper about the possibility Sunak could be mobbed by local well-wishers.

Sunak and his wife, Akshata Murty, the daughter of an Indian tech billionaire, are expected to visit and be pictured at Humayun’s tomb, a spiritual landmark for Hindus and a place that is dear to the couple, in images likely to resonate with voters of Indian origin at home.

The trip will be a welcome respite for Sunak given the contrast between his standing in Delhi and Deptford. The Tories languish 20 points behind in the opinion polls and the PM’s personal ratings have dropped steadily as his brand of bloodless technocratic leadership has, so far, failed to deliver on his pledges or excite the public.

When MPs return to Westminster after their summer break, Sunak and Sir Keir Starmer, his rival for the keys to Downing Street, will fire the starting gun on the next general election campaign.

Both leaders will spend the autumn spelling out who they are and what they stand for while honing their attacks on the other – in a bid to convince voters that only they can drag Britain from the malaise where nothing seems to work and living costs are soaring.

Sunak has four big moments before Christmas: the Tory party conference at the start of October, the King’s Speech on November 7, an autumn statement from the chancellor a week or two later, and a promised reshuffle (after minimal changes last week).

Work on Sunak’s speech to his party conference is well under way. The prime minister’s chief of staff, Liam Booth-Smith, and his political director and best friend, James Forsyth, are working up a text on the PM’s core beliefs.

“The focus will be on how he is prepared to make the difficult decisions on things which have been ignored by other leaders for years,” a senior source said.

Aides point to his Windsor agreement deal with the EU on the Northern Ireland border and the NHS workforce plan as examples of him doing things which “are right for the country even when they are hard or the benefits will take a long time”.

His speech on the Wednesday of the

Rishi Sunak will fly to India with his wife, Akshata Murty, below, for the G20 meeting. His new defence secretary Grant Shapps, right, the former energy secretary, is said to remain “evangelical” on green issues



party conference will also map out a more detailed explanation of what the public should expect from a continuation of the Sunak government – and with it some dividing lines with Labour. There are expected to be significant policy announcements at the conference from the Home Office, the Department of Health and Social Care and the Treasury.

The King’s Speech, which will be Charles’s first, will include bills likely to put Labour in awkward spots. One of the new policy ideas likely to be included is a planned change to the law to ensure that rapists serve their full sentence in jail, removing any prospect of early release.

The priority for both parties, however, is to win the battle to be trusted on the economy. Jeremy Hunt is to begin formal preparations for his autumn statement, which will include setting a formal date and commissioning the Office for Budget Responsibility to draw up its forecasts. The chancellor has already made clear that cuts to personal taxes remain off the table.

Hunt heads into the weekend buoyed by the news that the UK economy had recovered to its pre-pandemic size, following a dramatic upgrade to GDP by the Office for National Statistics.

A cabinet minister said: “This has been massively underplayed. We have been attacked for years as one of the laggards in the G7 and now we find that we aren’t. It wasn’t true. Germany is in recession and the eurozone can’t set interest rates to help all its members. We have been nimble and kept unemployment low.”

However, the picture remains gloomy. Throughout August, Hunt’s fiscal headroom (the amount he might have to spend on tax cuts) has remained in “negative territory”, a result of continued interest rate rises. It appears there is little likelihood of this changing noticeably before he delivers his statement.

The minister said: “We now need to go on the attack and make sure voters know that every Labour government has increased unemployment. The messaging needs to sharpen up.”

Labour will also have a particular focus on the economy this autumn. It plans to make the September 23 anniversary of Liz Truss’s disastrous “mini-budget”, blamed for tanking the pound and with it her premiership, a moment to go on the attack.

“We need to remind people of the disaster of that period, which we are all still paying for, and make the case that every-

thing we do will be built on a rock of economic stability,” a Labour source said.

Starmer won a key battle before the summer at Labour’s national policy forum when he got the unions to buy into his and shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves’s approach on tight fiscal rules.

Labour will also attack on immigration. They are withering about the government’s “small boats week” over the summer, when infighting at the Home Office and the discovery of legionella bacteria on the barge the government had hired to house asylum seekers overshadowed an effort to get on the front foot over immigration. “The only boat they managed to stop was their own,” crowed one senior Labour official.

Starmer is expected to reshuffle his shadow cabinet tomorrow. Lisa Nandy, the shadow levelling up secretary who is distrusted by Starmer’s aides, could be moved in a quest to ensure that Angela Rayner, the deputy leader, has a brief where her brand of blunt working-class partisanship can be best utilised.

Labour’s plan for its party conference, which takes place after the Tories’ for the first time in recent memory, will be to answer the “exam question” of: “If not them, why us?”

Shadow ministers have been told to spend no more than one of their five allotted minutes during speeches attacking the government, and the rest explaining what Labour would do differently. “We can’t just say the Tories are awful, the public knows that,” a Labour official said.

Starmer’s team has to balance looking like a government in waiting without looking complacent. Labour high command will tell MPs, unions and others hosting parties and fringe meetings that they are banned from introducing Starmer as “the next prime minister” when he arrives at events – a form of words often used by overeager activists when Jeremy Corbyn was leader. Many of those old enough still come out in hives recalling Neil Kinnock’s pre-election rally in Sheffield in 1992, where the triumphalist tone was seen as a contributing factor to a narrow Tory victory.

On policy, there will also be a twin approach. “We are going for both reassurance and hope,” said a source in Starmer’s circle. “Some people seem to think we need to choose between them but they are two wings of the same plane. We need to be reassuring on the economy, national security and law and order. We need to offer hope on the public services and climate change.”

Starmer will hope that the Rutherglen & Hamilton West by-election, set to take

place just before Labour’s conference, does not spoil things. Called after the departure of SNP MP Margaret Ferrier, who travelled the length of the UK with Covid-19, the seat is a prime target for Labour. If they fail to win it, as some think possible, it will suggest Starmer is not on course to make the kind of gains in Scotland that the party needs to secure a majority.

While an election is expected next autumn – and could be as late as January 2025 – Starmer and his chief strategist Morgan McSweeney have told their troops that they think Sunak might go as early as May. This could prevent local election results damaging the Tories further, and would avoid another summer of small boat arrivals.

Tory sources say they can’t predict the future, but their message is now geared to election themes. They spent the summer drawing dividing lines between them and Labour on energy security and housing. Sunak will confine his direct attacks on Starmer to areas where they have a philosophical difference on policy, though his language is expected to sharpen up. While he and No 10 will not sully their hands with black ops, Conservative campaign headquarters (CCHQ) under Isaac Levido and communications chief Alex “Wildman” Wild has had staff digging into Starmer’s decisions as director of public prosecutions for months.

The departure last week, for personal reasons, of No10 communications director Amber de Botton will be used as a chance to make the media operation more aggressive. Sunak’s spinner Nissy Chesterfield will succeed de Botton; Lucy Noakes, an aide to deputy PM Oliver Dowden, will become press secretary.

Battle-hardened campaign veterans Adam Atashzai, a Cameron-era strategist who will help out before returning to the private sector in March, and Jamie Njoku-Goodwin, the chief executive of UK Music who was a special adviser to Matt Hancock throughout the pandemic, will put Downing Street on a war footing.

When Njoku-Goodwin, one of the best chess players in Westminster, worked for Hancock, the former health secretary described his job as “playing political chess”, looking several moves ahead to plot the opportunities and perils ahead.

Over the next couple of weeks, Sunak and Steve Barclay, the health secretary, will roll out plans to deal with one looming peril: a winter crisis in the health service. There will be meas-

“The key is what Shapps won’t be doing



ures to ensure that elective operations – often the first thing to be cancelled – can continue.

The other change last week was Grant Shapps replacing Ben Wallace as defence secretary. His job as energy secretary was taken by Claire Coutinho, a close ally of Sunak and a rising star. Shapps is regarded as one of the government’s best media performers, but some colleagues questioned the wisdom of appointing someone with no military or departmental experience to the role. His fans point out that only two of the last 15 defence secretaries had any military experience.

Senior officers in the Ministry of Defence seem less than delighted. One last week compared the minister, who once sold get-rich-quick schemes under the pseudonym Michael Green, to Lawrence of Arabia, who entered the air force using a false name, TE Shaw. “He’s the new Lawrence,” the commander said. “We are wondering which name to do the vetting checks on.”

The real significance of the move, insiders claim, is not what Shapps is now going to be doing, but what he is not going to be doing. They say his appointment is part of a shift that will see the government water down the green agenda to create clear blue water between the Tories and Labour. A source said behind the scenes Shapps remained “evangelical” on a number of environmental issues.

The direction of travel was signalled last week when Michael Gove announced that the government would downgrade environmental rules around “nutrient neutrality” which have been blamed for blocking the construction of 100,000 homes. Sunak sided with Gove, despite warnings it would spark a major backlash from environmental groups. Downing Street pointed to this as another example of Sunak tackling a difficult subject which has been dodged by others.

The lingering concern among ministers and their aides, however, is that Sunak’s penchant for immersing himself in the minutiae of even the most banal decisions has gummed up government. One cabinet minister said: “Downing Street is like a black hole. Things go into the building and then nothing comes out. You ask people to put things on Rishi’s desk and they do and then he won’t make a decision. He’s constantly asking for more data.”

Booth-Smith is regarded as clear-eyed and fiercely intelligent, but some ministers and advisers want him to “kick the PM up the arse so he makes decisions quicker”. No wonder the prime minister is looking forward to his trip to India.

In the coming weeks, the political parties will hold what could be their final conferences before next year’s expected general election. But the conferences, and the election itself, are likely to be characterised by a timid, safety-first approach, and an unwillingness to risk controversy by addressing the problems that matter for this country’s long-term future.

Here are some of those issues. There are others.

PRODUCTIVITY STAGNATION

Productivity – the amount produced by each worker for each hour worked – started to stagnate more than four general elections ago and has remained unaddressed since. It is the ultimate driver of living standards, and its stagnation explains why wages, in real terms, are lower now than they were in early 2008, 15 years ago. This is the weakest sustained period for real wages since before the industrial revolution. The squeeze on living standards and the rise in the working poor drives more people into dependence on benefits. Most of the debate about how to lift productivity, by boosting investment, the quality of the infrastructure,

innovation and skills has taken place outside government.

LONG-TERM CARE

It is four years since Boris Johnson, accepting the post of prime minister, promised to “fix the crisis in social care once and for all”. He was not the first to do so. The crisis continues, as does the lack of co-ordination between the NHS and social care, despite the fact that the Whitehall department responsible for it is the Department of Health and Social Care. The health and social care levy, a 1.25 percentage point levy on national insurance contributions, intended to pay for the NHS backlog and long-term care, was scrapped by Liz Truss. The proposals of the Dilnot commission, which set the terms under which people should contribute to their care, up to a maximum of £35,000, was published 12 years ago and accepted in principle by the government a year later. It has been gathering dust since.

STRIKES

Last year saw the most days lost as a result of industrial disputes since 1989, and the past 12 months have seen four

million working days lost, with the effect particularly large on the railways and in the NHS. Strikes in the health service have added to the backlog of operations and treatments. On the railways, strikes have added to the problems of a system which is underinvested in and unreliable. The government is legislating to enforce minimum levels of service but it’s not clear how this will work. Neither government nor opposition appear to have much idea about how to deal with the return of militancy.

HOUSEBUILDING

Having set a target of 300,000 new homes in England annually, the government has shuffled away from it. England has not seen more than 300,000 new homes completed since 1969 and last year there were 178,000. This year the figure is likely to be lower. The government has been celebrating a new approach on the interpretation of former EU rules on so-called nutrient neutrality, which will allow more new homes to be built near rivers. But even on its own estimates, this will deliver only 100,000 more new homes, in total, by 2030. The key problem is the restrictive planning system, the sanctity

of the green belt and an unwillingness to take on “Nimby” vested interests.

THE EDUCATION TREADMILL

There is a tendency among politicians to believe that the rise of academies and improved Pisa (programme for international student assessment) scores mean that the education system is working well, but there are many problems. From 14 to 18 children are on an exam treadmill. Employers say school and college leavers lack basic skills. Technical education remains a poor relation. The students who go on to university emerge highly indebted and often with a degree that does not command a graduate premium. The system fails the disadvantaged, some of whom are “off-rolled” from schools for fear of dragging down their league table performance. New official figures show that 794,000 16-24 year-olds are “Neets”, not in education, employment or training.

AFFORDING THE NHS

The National Health Service is on course to command 40 per cent of all spending on public services, up from 25 per cent

at the turn of the century. Under the NHS workforce plan, the NHS in England will have between 2.3 million and 2.4 million workers by the mid-2030s, from 1.5 million now, and account for nearly half of all public employees. Its budget is set to rise by 70 per cent in real terms by the mid-2030s. Yet this is a service that is failing on many levels. Patients struggle to get timely GP appointments. Waiting lists are long and health outcomes are poor compared with most other European countries. Yet there is little appetite for radical reform.

AN INEFFICIENT TAX SYSTEM

The tax burden – taxes as a percentage of gross domestic product – is at its highest for more than 70 years. The problem is compounded by what the Institute for Fiscal Studies describes as a system which distorts, discourages employment, entrenches inequality, puts a brake on some economic activity and, because of its inefficient design, acts as an “unnecessary drag on productivity”. Successive chancellors have added to the complexity of the system, often by clumsily reversing their predecessors’ changes, or by inserting their own pet tax breaks. The Tories

even abolished their own Office of Tax Simplification and Labour has shown no willingness to take up the baton.

RELATIONS WITH THE EU

Public opinion has shifted on Brexit, with even those who supported it in 2016 conceding in polls that it has damaged the economy and added to cost of living pressures. Last week the government delayed for the fifth time the introduction of post-Brexit checks on food imports from the EU, conceding that the checks, when introduced in January next year – if they are not delayed further – will add to prices in the UK. Serious problems loom for UK car manufacturers, and others, under existing Brexit plans. Exports are more than 10 per cent lower in volume terms than at the end of 2019. Part of the problem is the EU trade deal hastily negotiated by Boris Johnson. For the Tories, improving the deal would be a way to head off public and business pressure for rejoining the EU. For Labour it should be an easy win. But both parties are reluctant to poke the hornets’ nest of Brexit.

David Smith is Economics Editor

Girl in the hijab who no one ever saw smile

Those who know her fugitive family say Sara Sharif was always withdrawn. New messages give an insight into events that led to her death

Glen Keogh
Haroon Janjua Rawalpindi

Shortly before 10pm on Tuesday, August 8, Nadeem Riaz was at home with his two children when his mobile phone lit up. The businessman, whose money transfer shop doubles as an ad hoc travel agency, was not expecting a call from his long-time client, Urfan Sharif.

Sharif, 41, a taxi driver based at Woking train station in Surrey, urgently required eight flights to Islamabad, Pakistan.

“He said he needed to book as soon as possible,” Riaz, 46, recalled. “I asked why and he said his cousin had passed away in Pakistan. He sounded normal. No different to his usual self.”

After the call, Sharif asked for updates on WhatsApp. Asked what type of tickets he wanted, Sharif responded with two words: “One way.” Seven minutes later, at 10.12pm, he asked: “Any luck [?]”

The request was successful. At 2pm the following day Sharif, his five children aged one to 13, his partner Beinash Batool, 29, and his brother Faisal Malik, 28, boarded British Airways flight 125 at Heathrow bound for Islamabad via Bahrain. The last-minute trip cost £5,180. At the time, Riaz did not realise that the Sharif family were leaving one child behind.

Shortly after touching down in Pakistan, the country of his birth, Sharif called 999 and told officers that they would find the body of his 10-year-old daughter, Sara, at the family’s neat semi-detached council house in Horsell, near Woking. The girl, who dreamt of becoming a model, was found with “multiple and extensive” injuries, likely to have been caused over a sustained period.

Eight days later, Surrey police named Sharif, Batool and Malik as people they wanted to speak to in connection with her death. An international hunt for the trio has led to raids on homes in Pakistan and relatives being arrested as the authorities in the country, with the help of the UK’s National Crime Agency, Interpol and the Foreign Office, look for them. They remain at large.

Meanwhile, one key question remains unanswered: what happened to Sara?

Speaking to sources close to the family as well as relatives in Pakistan, The Sunday Times has pieced together all that is known about the tragedy so far.

‘BURGER KING’ ROMANCE

Sitting behind the counter at his Safe Xpress shop, shielded by a glass partition and flanked by a large model of a Pakistan International Airlines jumbo jet, Riaz reveals that Sharif originally had plans to take Sara to Pakistan with the rest of the family. On May 23, Sharif inquired about booking flights for his whole family, including Sara, Batool and Malik, to Islamabad. They planned to leave on July 15 and return to the UK on September 2, coinciding with the school holidays. Sharif, however, did not respond when Riaz confirmed that tickets were available.

It was only when Riaz learnt of Sara’s death that the tragic importance of last month’s booking became clear. He is assisting police with their inquiries.

Riaz said he has known Sharif for

about 11 years. The taxi driver would use his services as often as three times a month to send money to another brother, Imran, in Pakistan.

The pair would exchange pleasantries during times such as the Muslim festival of Eid. He said he did not question Sharif’s urgent telephone call last month because he would often receive such requests from clients if a family member had fallen ill overseas. Indeed, Sharif is said to have last returned to Pakistan in November last year on a one-way ticket following his mother’s death.

“When he came in, he always seemed to be in a happy mood,” Riaz said. “He would take the kids out at the weekend to parks in places such as Guildford and post videos on TikTok of them playing.”

Like anyone who met Sharif and his relatives, Riaz is struggling to reconcile the image of the man he helped for more than a decade with one who left the country while the body of his eldest daughter lay at home.

“For the first few days after it happened, every time I looked at my own daughter I felt so sad for Sara,” Riaz said. “I love my daughter [who is 6] so much. How could anyone leave their daughter?”

Sharif is said to have come to Britain from his hometown of Jhelum, Pakistan, in 2001. He met his first wife, Olga Domin, a Polish citizen, when the pair worked together “at a Burger King”, according to one acquaintance. They married in a Surrey register office in 2009 and had a son, now 13. In January 2013, Sara was born in Slough, Berkshire.

CURTAINS ALWAYS CLOSED

One neighbour of the couple in Woking said they rarely interacted with others in the small cul-de-sac where they lived with their two small children.

“They never said hello but they weren’t troublemakers. They just didn’t speak much,” she said. “They were both polite but I found it odd that the curtains were always closed.”

Domin, a Catholic who later went by the married name Sharif, is said to have wanted the children to grow up learning about both Christianity and Islam. Such was Sharif’s initial commitment to their marriage, he is said to have become fluent in Polish. But in 2017, Sharif and Domin separated. Last month it was suggested that Sharif was awarded full custody of Sara and her brother in 2019 and that Domin had seen her daughter only twice in the intervening period and not at all since 2021. She settled in

Yeovil, Somerset, and did not respond to a request for an interview last week.

Last month she said tensions arose when Sharif allegedly began to impose Islam on them. “I didn’t want to push the kids. I told them if they want to be

Muslim, they can be Muslim, but they can choose later in life,” she told The Sun. However, she said, they began to refuse certain foods that were not halal.

Despite Sara’s mother’s suggestion that Sharif was implementing a Muslim regime within the household, community leaders have said that the father did not appear particularly religious.

Imam Hafiz Hashmi, of the Shah Jahan Mosque in Woking, the first purpose-built mosque in Britain, confirmed that Sharif would worship at the mosque but was “not a regular visitor”.

“He was not too religious,” he said. “We might see him at Friday prayers but not at daily prayers. We have around 12,000 people who attend this mosque and even then I know most of those by name but I did not know him by name. I recognised him as someone who would attend occasionally and maybe attend weddings.”

FAMILY’S ODD ONE OUT

Sharif then embarked on a relationship with Batool, who lived in Luton and is 12 years his junior. They went on to have four children – twin girls now aged seven, and another daughter, 4. The youngest, a boy, was born in July last year.

The large family bounced around a number of properties in the Woking and Byfleet areas of Surrey before settling in a three-bedroom property in Hammond Road in April. Last week, police were also seen at their previous property in Byfleet, a small ground-floor council flat.

By April, Sara had been withdrawn from her primary school, St Mary’s C of E, in Byfleet. Batool, a glamorous housewife, told neighbours that she was planning to home-school her.

One source close to the family said that, by this stage, Sara wore a hijab every day. In fact, the source said, they never saw her long, dark hair until the police released a distinctive photograph after her death. They said, however, that Batool, Sharif and the other children all wore western clothing. Islamic doctrine traditionally indicates that a female begins wearing a headscarf when she reaches puberty.

The large family at Number 10 immediately ingratiated themselves with neighbours. When celebrating Eid, they offered meals to those on the street. The family would bake cakes and the children would play happily in the back garden. One neighbour said the Sharifs looked after their grandchildren for a short time and gave them ice lollies and biscuits.

Sharif maintained a tidy household, getting the children to help clean his BMW taxi while he washed the patio driveway. He planted wildflowers and mowed the lawn.

The family only briefly courted controversy when Malik, who spent a lot of time with the family and was said to be the most conservative in the household, repeatedly refused to speak to women.

Batool made no attempt to inform well-wishers that she was not the biological mother of the two eldest children, and told one neighbour she had married Sharif at 16, but eyebrows were still raised at the prospect of home-schooling only one of the children.

“I didn’t like the sound of it ... a young

child,” a source said. “She said at the last school she had been bullied for wearing the hijab so they decided she would be home-schooled. She said it was easy – she could use BBC Bitesize [a free online study guide]. People felt it was unusual that she wore the hijab but her mother – we know now, her stepmother – didn’t.”

They added that Sara appeared “very withdrawn”. “She used to hold the baby, and she seemed to love being with him,” they added. “She would watch the other children playing but wouldn’t join in. She wasn’t a smiley girl. In fact, we never saw her smile. “I told Beinash she should be mixing with children her own age but she said she is making friends at the mosque and at swimming lessons. My granddaughter played with Sara but said she didn’t say very much. She said she was ‘very mature ... quite serious’.”

CUTS AND BRUISES

The parent of one pupil at Sara’s school said she attended with visible injuries to her face and neck one day this year.

“Just before the Easter holidays she was in school and had cuts and bruises on her face and her neck,” the woman, who gave her name as Jessica, told the BBC. “My daughter had asked what had happened and she said she’d fallen off a bike and then kind of walked away. The next day the teacher announced she had left school and she was being home-schooled.”

After Sara’s death, Surrey council confirmed that she had been known to the authorities, and a “multi-agency rapid review” was under way. The council declined to answer a list of detailed questions about its interactions with the Sharif family while the review is taking place.

Any parent can elect to take their child out of mainstream education – they just need to write a letter to the headteacher informing them of their plans, in order to avoid prosecution for failing to ensure attendance. Surrey council’s guidelines on home education state that “the local authority has no legal power or duty to monitor home education on a routine basis although the local authority will make inquiries if it is not clear that a child is receiving suitable education”. The pol-



Sara’s body was found at home in Woking, Surrey, top, after her father, Urfan, above right, had flown to Pakistan with his partner, Beinash Batool, above, his brother Faisal Malik and Sara’s five siblings. Police in Punjab province are searching for the family. Below, Sara’s mother Olga Sharif

icy document says parents or carers will be contacted “at least annually”.

The council did not confirm whether the Sharif family had been contacted or visited.

On Friday, police officers were speaking to the school’s head teacher, Jacquie Chambers. Surrey police also confirmed that it had had “limited and historic” contact with the family.

Outside the Sharif family home, one note left among the flowers, balloons and teddy bears summed up the growing public anger over Sara’s death. “This should never have happened to a young life,” it read. “Taken too soon. I am so sorry baby girl. The system failed you. Your school failed you and most of all, the people that were meant to love you the most failed you.”

Almost 4,000 miles away in the city of Rawalpindi, Pakistan, the repercussions of the tragedy at 10 Hammond Road are being felt keenly by Sharif’s family.

Sharif’s brothers, Zareef and Imran, were arrested by police in Jhelum during their hunt for the on-the-run trio, as were two in-laws. On Friday, a court hearing was held where the men petitioned for their release.

SPY TEAMS ON THE HUNT

Outside court, Sharif’s father, Muhammad, 68, urged his son to co-operate with the police as he revealed that Sharif had stayed at the family home with Batool and Malik and the children for two nights before fleeing. “He did not inform us about Sara and her death, and suddenly [they] all went away,” he said.

They are believed to have gone to stay with in-laws near the town of Domeli, leaving after about six hours because they had “urgent things to do”, according to Zahoor Akhter, a village elder.

A report seen by The Sunday Times from Nasir Mehmood Bajwa, the district police officer of the Jhelum area, says “hectic efforts are being made to locate the suspects and their children”, including the use of “spy teams” at properties linked to them.

Sharif senior, who says he does not know his son’s whereabouts, said the police have turned on the family. “We are innocent but the police are harassing our family members including women. We have no life and the police have taken our mobile phones in their custody and are controlling our lives.”

On Sara, he added: “She was a darling granddaughter and very jolly in nature. I remember Sara was curious to know about our village and played with me in our courtyard. I was shocked when I heard about her death. I don’t know why this incident happened.”

An inquest which opened last week could not ascertain the cause of Sara’s death but confirmed it was likely to be “unnatural”.

Last month the Daily Mail claimed police found a handwritten note next to Sara’s body that allegedly named her killer. The newspaper, which redacted the name, said the letter stated: “Whoever sees this, it was XXXX who killed [Sara] ... by beating. I am running away because I am scared.”

Additional reporting: Katie Tarrant

Oxford redirects avalanche of students’ online shopping to curb emissions

Nicholas Hellen
Transport Editor

Porters have been a staple of life at universities for decades, helping students at colleges from Edinburgh and York to Lancaster and Cambridge with letters, visitors and finding their feet.

In recent years, however, their jobs have been consumed by a very modern challenge: online shopping deliveries. The porters at Oxford’s 44 colleges field about 100 van deliveries a day during term time, with six of those colleges receiving 500,000 deliveries a year.

Now, those six colleges are

taking a stand, asking students to have parcels delivered to a depot on an industrial estate a mile outside the city, and brought to them by cargo bike. All the day’s deliveries would arrive at the same time by electric bike, reducing congestion and saving 50,000 litres of diesel and about 100 tons of CO₂, depending on the participation rate. The trial, which is part of a push to stop delivery vans clogging roads, will start this week at Corpus Christi, Magdalen, St Anne’s, University, Wadham and Wolfson.

Online shopping accounts for an estimated 26 per cent

of retail sales in the UK and the consequences are particularly frustrating for small cities such as Oxford, which is built around a core of narrow medieval streets.

Peter Burden, lodge manager at St Anne’s College, said: “When I first started here 15 years ago, we might get only 25 parcels a week, but now we are averaging four or five hundred.”

Students will be asked to change their addresses with courier firms such as Evri, formerly known as Hermes, DPD, Fedex, UPS and DHL, to the depot site.

Angela Unsworth, domestic bursar at University



Cargo bikes deliver to colleges from a collection depot

College, the alma mater of President Clinton, is co-ordinating the trial. She said: “If we can say to the students: change your Amazon address, and all your other addresses if you can, then others will be swept up without them even noticing.”

She points out that students and staff will not be compelled to take part, and deliveries from fast food restaurants and other time-sensitive or precious items, such as medicine, will still come to the porter’s lodge.

Ardeel Hussain, 19, president of the Junior Common Room, said his fellow students would

support the scheme because it would improve road safety, as well as cutting emissions. “It won’t be too much of a hassle,” he said.

Chris Benton, founder of Pedal & Post, the cargo bike firm appointed to operate the trial, said that its prospects, at Oxford and across the country, depended on people power. “It’s that kind of social anxiety. If your friends move to a sustainable model, it does put pressure on others to join.”

He is also in talks to work directly with Evri and DPD because he needs them to contribute a share of the costs of delivery if the scheme is to

become commercially viable. The trial scheme has received £30,000 of subsidy from the six colleges, but would become self-financing if the courier firms chip in and acknowledge the savings achievable by making a bulk delivery to a hub, rather than sending a driver with each package. The bikes haul a trailer which is 2.6m long and capable of carrying a sofa.

Other parts of the country are also trying to switch deliveries to cargo bikes. Transport for London has announced proposals to replace 17 per cent of van journeys in central London by 2030.



The Inbetweeners, Call the Midwife and Poldark were hit shows commissioned by Danny Cohen, below — but now the former director of BBC TV is working for a US firm, Spotter, and has his eye on YouTube stars such as MrBeast and PewDiePie

A billionaire buying up YouTube videos? Watch out, Netflix...

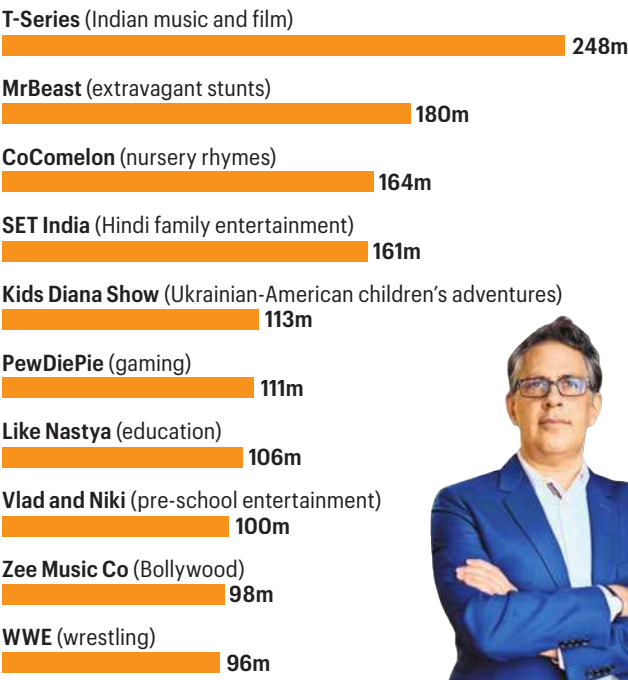
Oliver Shah Associate Editor

Danny Cohen used to be a titan of terrestrial television. As head of Channel 4’s youth programming, he commissioned *The Inbetweeners* and *Skins*. As controller of BBC1 and then director of BBC TV, he was responsible for *Call the Midwife*, *Happy Valley* and *Poldark*. But Cohen is now interested in YouTube, because it is challenging terrestrial channels and even streaming services as the main source of what many people watch on their family TV. “There are now more hours a month of YouTube viewed on connected TVs in American homes than Netflix,” he said. “It’s very striking. It speaks to the underestimation of YouTube in the average conversation about the entertainment industry, and to how many

hours of screen time are being spent on short-form digital media rather than long-form narrative content.” Having left the corporation in 2015, the man from Auntie found a benefactor in Sir Leonard Blavatnik, the Ukrainian-born billionaire who owns Warner Music. Blavatnik hired Cohen to build an entertainment investment business. Over the past eight years they have assembled a portfolio ranging from London’s 300-year-old Theatre Royal Haymarket – where Sarah Snook, aka Shiv Roy from *Succession*, will play all 26 roles in an experimental production of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – to Spotter, a Californian start-up. It is clear where the big money lies. In its brief life, Spotter has spent more than \$775 million (£616 million) buying the YouTube video back catalogues of self-made

stars such as MrBeast, a 25-year-old who does stunts for an audience of millions. Other Spotter-backed YouTubers include Donald De La Haye Jr, a former American football player whose Deestroying channel features sport-related skits, and Piper Rockelle, a Hollywood teenager who stages pranks. The start-up’s more than 700,000 videos are watched 88 billion times a month. It offers creators an upfront amount for their old libraries and holds them for a set period – usually three years or more – during which it collects advertising revenues and hopes to “optimise” viewer numbers. While Spotter gets the ad income, the stars get a lump sum they can use to expand their empires. MrBeast, real name Jimmy Donaldson, has done three deals with Spotter. Period drama it ain’t. But

TOP 10 MOST-SUBSCRIBED YOUTUBE CHANNELS



Source: eDigital

Danny Cohen



these shows have high production values. Donaldson has said on Twitter that his most famous episode, a playful recreation of the South Korean Netflix hit *Squid Game*, cost \$3.5 million to make. And the audience numbers are huge: *\$456,000 Squid Game in Real Life!* has been viewed nearly 490 million times – almost twice as many times as the original. MrBeast’s YouTube channels have more than 180 million subscribers. Contrast that with terrestrial TV. The number of programmes attracting what Ofcom, the media regulator, defines as “mass audiences” – four million or more – has halved in the past eight years. Last year the three most-watched were public events rather than creatively developed shows: the Platinum Jubilee, the Queen’s funeral and England’s

World Cup quarter-final against France. Cohen, 49, believes the media establishment missed the significance of platforms such as YouTube and TikTok because they often feature homespun material and relatively unknown names. “Long-form storytelling involves narratives and glamorous stars, which a lot of this other material doesn’t,” he said. “It’s better to write a story about Brad Pitt or Margot Robbie, because the audience reading a lot of this stuff knows who they are. They might also be talking together about the compelling narratives you get in movies and series on Netflix and elsewhere. The media conversation is dominated by people of my kind of age.” Ofcom’s latest report on viewing habits said that even over-64s were switching off linear TV and subscribing to

streaming services such as Netflix and Disney+. Younger children were using TikTok less but young adults aged 15 to 24 spent almost an hour a day on the app. Three quarters of advertising money – £26.1 billion – was spent online last year. Four out of five teens and adults told Ofcom they watched content on YouTube. The most popular genre among adults was “how to” videos – DIY tips, recipes and so on. Cohen was a passionate defender of the BBC in his eight years there and is against significantly changing the £159-a-year licence fee, which faces a fresh review in the autumn. The BBC’s royal charter is up for renewal at the end of 2027. “We all need to protect the BBC,” Cohen said. “It’s imperfect – but it’s truly one of the crown jewels of the nation. We don’t have that many crown jewels.”

Schools may beshut for months

Crumbling concrete may conceal a secondary danger — hazardous asbestos in roofs. Some buildings could even be demolished

Ben Spencer, Sian Griffiths and Harry Yorke

Asbestos could be exposed in schools affected by crumbling concrete, experts have warned, meaning that many could shut for months. There are fears that such is the scale of the problem that some schools may even have to be demolished entirely. More than 150 schools were told last week – days before they were due to reopen – that they would have to close buildings containing unstable reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC). Engineers have warned with increasing urgency that RAAC, which was used by builders between the 1950s and 1980s and is often described as “Aero bar” concrete, can become unstable when it exceeds its 30-year lifespan. Experts warn that the presence of RAAC also increases the danger of exposure to asbestos, which kills 5,000 people a year in the UK. Asbestos is safe while stable but if it is disturbed – for example, if a classroom roof made from crumbling concrete suddenly collapses – it could release fibres which, if inhaled, can cause mesothelioma, asbestosis and lung cancer. Even the process of removing RAAC panels, or simply assessing them, could disturb asbestos, engineers said.

The Sunday Times is campaigning for the government to introduce a proactive phased removal of asbestos.

Asbestos is present in at least 80 per cent of schools nationwide. Crucially, RAAC and asbestos often exist in the same buildings, as both were used widely in the postwar building boom, making it inevitable that many of the head teachers forced to deal with the crumbling concrete this week will also have to tackle asbestos.

Even assessing the state of concrete in schools will be complicated, he said. “If there is asbestos present you have to make sure you are not going to disturb it. And if there’s a risk that it is going to be disturbed, [it] has to be removed by a specialist registered company prior to the main construction work starting. So it does add complication, it adds cost, it adds time.”

John Wallace, managing director of Ridgmont, a specialist construction and real estate law firm in London, said: “Asbestos in schools presents a significant complicating factor in remediating issues relating to RAAC. Asbestos, once disturbed, is a serious hazard.”

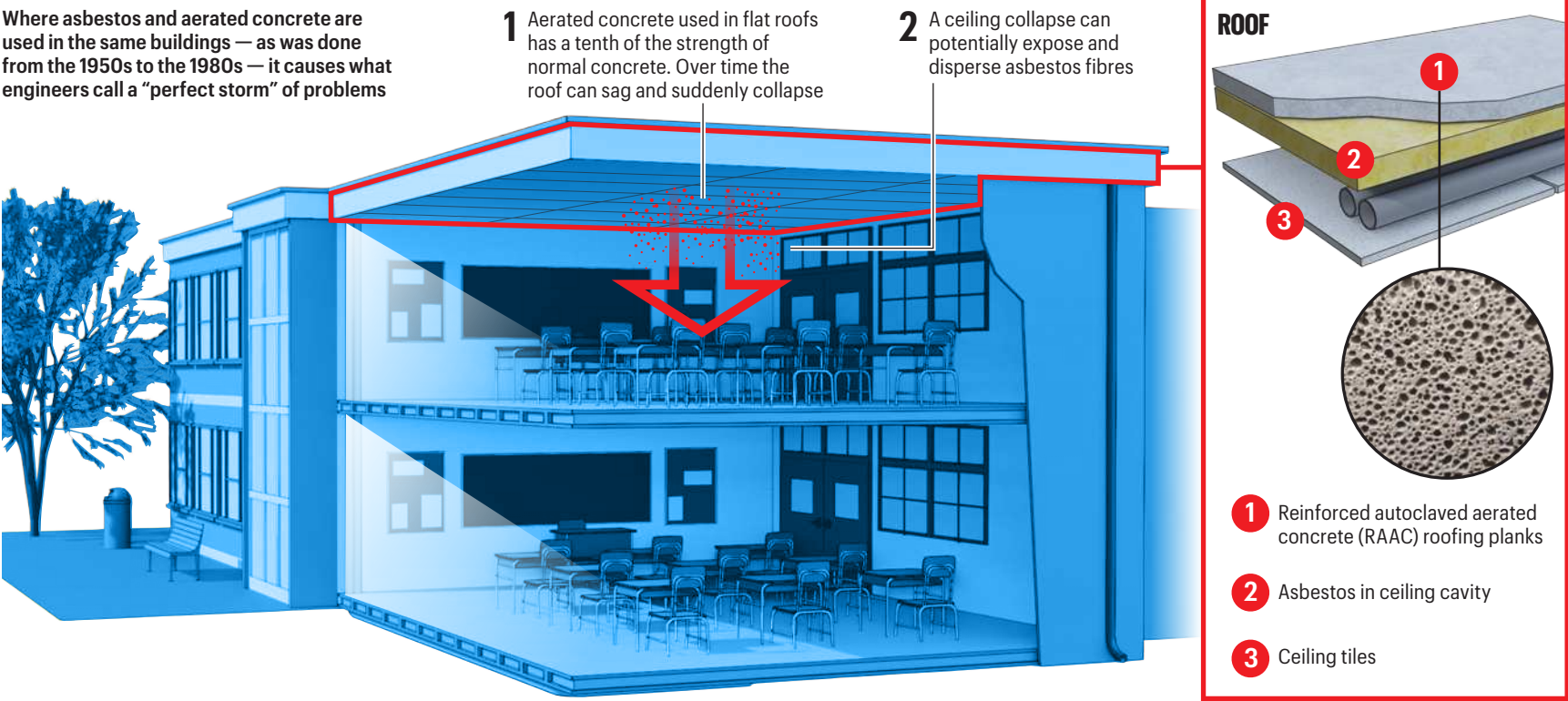
He added: “Those responsible for such buildings and those engaged to undertake the work carry a heavy burden. Serious consequences follow for those that do not meet their obligations under the relevant legislation.”

Asbestos, which is the name for naturally occurring mineral fibres, is strong, does not dissolve in water and is heat-resistant so was used in building materials, particularly for insulation. However, it was banned in the UK in 1985 after the health risks were exposed.

Caroline Evans, head teacher at Parks Primary in Leicester, said that both RAAC and asbestos were discovered at her

THE TWIN HIDDEN RISKS IN ROOFS

Where asbestos and aerated concrete are used in the same buildings — as was done from the 1950s to the 1980s — it causes what engineers call a “perfect storm” of problems



school. She has been forced to move her 485 pupils to an office block and a children’s centre. Plans have been drawn up for the construction of two-storey portable cabins on the school’s playing fields, with completion due before Christmas. The old school building may have to be demolished, she said. “They have to take off the whole roof and they are looking at replacing it but if I was a betting lady I think they will knock down the whole school. It is not just RAAC, there is subsidence too.”

Another school leader, who works for an academy trust in the east of England with three schools affected by RAAC, said that children would be taught in a “rotation system” of shifts, with some in classrooms while others are kept at home for online lessons. Asbestos is also a problem, they said, with £1 million already spent on stripping out the material across the trust. Engineers are now poring over the asbestos surveys again to check whether it is also present in the roofs where RAAC has been identified.

RAAC is typically used in planks and panels on flat roofs. Because it is filled with bubbles of air it is very lightweight – so light that it floats on water – with a density about a quarter that of standard concrete.

If left over time, the air bubbles can soak up moisture, particularly if the roof leaks or is badly maintained. The planks become prone to sagging and suddenly collapse. “It takes quite a long time for that process to get going,” said Adrian Tagg, associate professor of building surveying at the University of Reading. “But it reaches a critical point and all of a sudden it starts to fall.”

In December the Department for

ACT NOW ON ASBESTOS

Education published guidance warning school manufacturers to “take particular care” when inspecting roofs made of RAAC owing to the possible presence of “asbestos-containing materials” in ceiling voids. It said that in some situations aerated concrete planks may even have been coated in Artex, a material that contains asbestos.

Schools – as with all public buildings – are required to maintain asbestos registers, identifying the location of any use of the material. But a report by the Health and Safety Executive in July revealed that a third of the schools it inspected in the course of a year had been warned of “non-compliance” in their legal duty to manage asbestos effectively. It said that often inspectors had found that there was no up-to-date survey clearly showing the location of any asbestos, or that schools were not regularly monitoring the condition of parts of the buildings containing it.

Tagg said: “It’s very hard to see asbestos dust concealed between panels, or asbestos in ceiling voids. So it’s not unusual to find an asbestos register that looks complete, but if you go a bit deeper ... you might find some asbestos not on the register.”

In July officials at the Department for Education publicly apologised after asbestos was discovered in the rubble of a school block that had been demolished because it contained RAAC concrete. The building, at King Edmund School in Rochford, Essex, was knocked down in May last year but the asbestos was only discovered in November, just before work started on a replacement block.

Even if asbestos is not present, replacing panels affected by RAAC is extremely difficult, said Tagg. “You’re talking about

effectively removing a roof. So you have to ask yourself the cost benefit of replacing a roof of a building that is 40 or 50 years old. Are you after another 20 years of life? Or is it better to replace the building as a whole with something that has a 50-year life. It comes down to money – and budgets aren’t there to do that kind of work.”

Furious politicians and teachers asked why the decision to close schools was taken so late. Evans said: “This is the most challenging thing I have ever tackled. Covid was easy compared with this. The situation was apparent two years ago – where was the urgency in tackling it?” Priti Patel, the former home secretary and MP for Witham in Essex, where five schools have been affected, said: “Ministers need to explain why the decision to close schools was not taken sooner so that working parents could plan. This would have prevented disruption to teaching ... This is not a new issue and the government will have to account for its actions.” Scientists identified RAAC as a safety issue in the 1990s but the full danger became apparent in 2018 when a roof collapsed at Singwell Primary in Gravesend, Kent – fortunately on a Saturday.

The National Audit Office estimated that 24,000 school buildings – 38 per cent – had exceeded their initial life span. A government survey of schools was carried out over the past year to identify the presence of RAAC. At the start of summer, with 6,300 schools questioned, 572 with suspected RAAC were identified, with 8,600 yet to respond. More detailed investigations then found that 156 schools had confirmed RAAC, with about 60 of these at critical risk.

In the summer term four primary schools in Tyne and Wear and Essex were closed because “crumbly” concrete had been found in the roofs.

Over the summer, three incidents occurred which made officials reconsider their risk assessment. According to a Whitehall source, the first red flag was raised when a sudden collapse occurred at a commercial property in Wales. A few weeks later an RAAC beam slipped at an educational institution in Scotland in a setting that would not have been considered critical. Then, just a week ago, a ceiling fell in a school in England.

Although nobody was hurt in any of these incidents, officials realised that schools that had previously been identified as “non-critical” were at risk of sudden collapse. On Thursday officials announced that 156 schools would be forced to close spaces or buildings or put in place “mitigations” to reduce the risk.

Tagg says that the issue spreads far more widely than schools. The NHS has known for years that it has RAAC in its hospitals, and has identified risk areas and started taking remedial measures. But other public sector buildings such as courts and police stations are also likely to contain the substance. “Any flat-roofed public sector building built in about 30 years from the 1950s could potentially include it,” he said.

A taped-off section of Parks Primary, where both RAAC and asbestos were discovered

Where was the urgency to fix it?



Ulez glitch means older vehicles that meet pollution standard still get fines

Drivers are being urged to check with manufacturers after it emerged that some cars made before 2005 are compliant after all

Nicholas Hellen Transport Editor

When the ultra-low emission zone was expanded across Greater London last week the guidelines seemed clear: the penalties generally applied to petrol cars made before 2005 and diesel cars made before 2015.

Some older cars are compliant, however, if they were made to cleaner standards before these became mandatory – but their owners may have no idea that they are exempt and could still be fined.

The camera system that checks vehicles driving in the Ulez and issues them with daily charges of £12.50 or fines of £180 has failed to spot older cars that meet its emissions standards. The problem is affecting drivers of models from manufacturers including BMW, Land Rover, Mercedes and Toyota.

Senior officials at the Department for Transport (DfT) called in Trevor Wood, chairman of the British Independent Motor Trade Association, on Thursday for talks about the scale of the problem.

Wood said it might affect 100,000 petrol cars registered between 1999 and 2005. He added: “They should put the whole scheme on hold and no fines should be issued until this has been sorted out.”

He also pointed out that some compliant cars may have been scrapped unnecessarily because their owners did not know they met the standards. Drivers are eligible for a £2,000 scrappage payment under a £160 million scheme administered by Sadiq Khan, mayor of London, and funded by the taxpayer.

For most drivers, the only way to check is to obtain a certificate of conformity from the manufacturer detailing its level of emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx) and particulate matter (PM). These are not routinely supplied when buying a car, although newer cars may have the details set out in their log books.

The problem has come to light because of the experience of motorists such as Dharminder Viridi, 43, who lives in Harmondsworth, west London, with his wife, Maria, and three children. He was

fined when he drove his BMW 320i in the central London section of the Ulez – in force since 2019 – to drop his father at a medical appointment.

Viridi initially decided not to challenge the fine because his car was registered in October 2000, four years before the standard cut-off date cited by Transport for London (TfL) in its guidance. However, when a friend told him that his BMW, registered in 1996, was officially compliant, Viridi obtained a certificate of conformity from BMW that confirmed that his car had NOx emissions within the Ulez range. He asked TfL to check again.

TfL confirmed that his car was exempt from charges but has not reimbursed his fine. It points out in guidance that Ulez compliance is based on the declared emissions of a vehicle rather than its age, and states that “cars that meet the standards have been available since 2001”.

It does not explain what steps motorists can take to check if their vehicle has been classified correctly. Enforcement cameras for the scheme read number

plates, which TfL says are “checked against our database”. It does not have access to the central government database used for other clean air zones in cities such as Birmingham and Bristol. A TfL spokesman said it used the “highest quality of data using similar information as other authorities” based on a range of sources and updated by the DVLA every four weeks.

Wood said it was unfair to put the onus

on drivers to prove technical details about their vehicles when manufacturers routinely ignored legal duties to provide the certificate of conformity free. He said some problems that had emerged with Ulez might have been averted if the DfT and its agencies, including the Vehicle Certification Agency and the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, had enforced the system properly.

The Ulez enforcement system has also struggled to recognise vehicles with personal number plates. Edmund King, president of the AA, said members had also found that it was slow to process changes made by the DVLA. He added: “This means that somebody with a zero emissions electric vehicle who has fitted a personal registration plate that has been approved by DVLA could still get a ticket for entering the Ulez ten days later.”

“There is a certain irony that the owner of a zero emissions vehicle may get fined for being in an ultra-low emission zone when there are zero tailpipe emissions and indeed no tail pipe.” The net-

work of 2,700 enforcement cameras has come under attack, with more than 300 thought to have been vandalised between April and mid-August. Scotland Yard said it had logged 171 such crimes since August 17.

The DfT said: “It is for the mayor of London to ensure motorists are fully informed of how his expanded Ulez charge impacts them. Manufacturers have a responsibility to provide certificates of conformity.”

TfL said: “There may be a tiny number of individual cases of vehicles that [met] emission standards ahead of time and we continually update the vehicle checker with this information for individual vehicles when provided.”

“The tiny number of vehicles affected should have been issued with a certificate with emissions information when they were purchased. They can apply for a new one from the manufacturer if they do not have one and TfL will ensure they are on the system and don’t have to pay the Ulez charge.”

“
Put the whole scheme on hold

There were two stalkers – my ex and the investigating officer

Hannah Al-Othman and Megan Agnew

When Dr Marie Gervail went to the police about her stalker, she was terrified. A man she had briefly dated, Kelvin James, was tracking her movements and she wanted their help.

But she says her concerns were ignored and her fears dismissed, and she was treated by Lancashire police “like the problem”. Determined to see justice done, she eventually had to hire a solicitor to get James convicted.

Last week, Gervail, a gynaecologist, was in court again, this time to witness the sergeant who investigated her case, Justin Fraser, being jailed for 21 months for stalking a female colleague. His offences took place while he was investigating Gervail’s stalker. “I effectively had two stalkers in my case,” said Gervail. “The perpetrator of my crime and one of those who was charged with protecting me.”

When she found out about Fraser’s conviction – a friend spotted his name by chance in a local newspaper – she said: “This answered many of my questions as to why I had not been taken seriously.

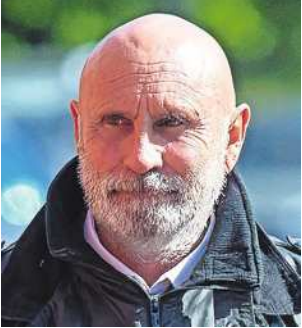
“I feel that justice could never have been done in my case by the police officer, given that he himself had that same mindset.”

She said the cases involving stalking and harassment investigated by Fraser needed to be reopened. “If this is what you’ve been convicted of, it’s bound to cloud your judgment on how you deal with these cases,” she said. “I would suggest all of his cases need to be reviewed.”

Fraser, 51, from Liverpool, was a sergeant with Lancashire police before being arrested by the force’s anti-corruption unit in September last year and suspended from duties. He



Marie Gervail was harassed by Kelvin James, below. Justin Fraser, bottom, the officer who took on the case, was stalking a colleague at the time



retired while under investigation, which found he illegally used police systems to monitor his victim’s whereabouts, stalking her from Boxing Day 2020 to July last year. Last month, a misconduct hearing found that, if he were still a serving officer, he would have been found guilty of gross misconduct and dismissed.

Fraser’s victim, who was also a police officer, met him in 2015 when she was a recruit and he was her tutor, Preston crown court heard last week. In December 2017 they began a brief relationship, despite Fraser being married, but the woman ended the affair after six months when she grew tired of his jealous behaviour and unfulfilled promises to leave his wife.

The pair remained in contact. After Fraser messaged, accusing her of having a relationship with a colleague, she asked him to leave her alone and eventually blocked him. He continued to contact her. Over the course of his campaign, Fraser made 178 illegal checks using police computer systems, 30 of which were made in a day. Fraser, who pleaded guilty to stalking and misusing police computers, was also handed a restraining order,

preventing him from contacting the woman for a period of seven years.

Gervail had dated her stalker, James, 58, in 2020, after she employed him as a handyman. She was unaware he had a previous conviction for harassment from 1998. After their relationship ended, James started telling Gervail that he knew where she had been. It was then that she discovered a tracker on her car, which James later pleaded guilty to fitting.

Gervail’s case was dealt with by a police constable and his sergeant, Fraser. Although James admitted attaching the tracker, Gervail was told police would give him a verbal warning and the case would be closed. She lobbied the force to take her case seriously, and represented herself in the family court to obtain a civil protection order. “I should never have had to do this, I should have been protected by the police,” she said.

James was convicted under a lesser stalking offence. He pleaded guilty and was given a 12-week curfew and an 18-month restraining order – which is soon to expire.

The Crown Prosecution Service acknowledged there had been inadequacies in the investigation and that it should have authorised a charge of the more serious stalking offence. “I am incredibly sorry that you have been let down,” a spokeswoman said.

Nazir Afzal, the northwest’s former chief crown prosecutor, said: “We are sadly well aware that misogyny in policing is as prevalent as it is in wider society, but there is nothing worse than a misogynist with a warrant card.”

Lancashire police said it had sent out refresher training to officers and it was “always striving to improve the service we offer to victims and how we investigate their complaints”.



“
I should have been protected

Turn up the things you love

Up to **£500 OFF*** selected Invisible Hearing Aids

Our invisible hearing aids are small, discreet, and now up to £500 off all September. And, with interest-free payment plans,** there’s no better time!

Book your **FREE** hearing check today†

Visit **bootshearingcare.com** or call **0345 200 7052*****

Boots
Hearingcare

*Offer ends 15th October 2023. £500 off a pair Phonak Titanium P90 hearing aids only, £400 off a pair of Phonak Titanium P70 hearing aids. Money off value halved on single purchases. Cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer. Subject to product availability and suitability. Ts and Cs Apply. †Over 18s and Hearingcare stores only. **Minimum 10% deposit required. Ask in store for further details. Terms & Conditions Apply. Credit subject to status and affordability. Terms & Conditions Apply. Minimum spend £500, minimum 10% deposit required. Available on Premium range Hearing aids only. Boots Hearingcare Ltd is a credit broker and is Authorised and Regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Credit is provided by Novuna Personal Finance, a trading style of Mitsubishi HC Capital UK PLC, authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Financial Services Register no. 704348. ***Local call rates apply and mobiles may vary.

A ‘despicable’ conman who used a kaleidoscope of outlandish identities to cheat family, friends and lovers out of £1.2m has finally been sent to jail. Here we unpick his astonishing web of lies



Jon Oliver told his young fiancé that he was going to pick up a new car – then never came back. Oliver, 38, was a British Airways pilot with a £30 million trust fund. He was renovating his £10.5 million townhouse in Notting Hill and planning to purchase a holiday home on millionaires’ row in Sandbanks, Dorset. He had designed his own Rolls-Royce at a garage in Mayfair and invited his friends from a glamorous Soho set to his stag do in the US and wedding at the top of the Shard.

But it was all a lie. In fact, “Jon Oliver” was Jody Francis Oliver, an unemployed 45-year-old from the Welsh borders with a wife and three children.

Today, The Sunday Times can reveal that he was also a fraudster with seven different identities, which he used to pull off scams estimated to be worth more than £4.5 million, and is thought to have personally pocketed about £1.2 million. Over the past two decades he has had a wife, two male fiancés and at least two boyfriends while pretending to be variously a police officer, a cruise ship captain, a Swedish-speaking car expert and a friend of Boris Johnson.

Last month, Oliver was sentenced to six years in prison for fraud and theft – the latest in a series of court cases – and his full story can now be told.

“You are a despicable fraudster,” Judge Jeremy Jenkins told him. “The time has come to end the charade. The time for chances and leniency are over.”

Over the past eight months we have spoken to dozens of Oliver’s friends, family members, acquaintances and victims to piece together his spiralling life of lies.

Jody Oliver: special constable and off-road entrepreneur

Jody Francis Oliver was born in Knighton, a small market town straddling the Powys-Shropshire border. His father, Richard, 75, worked in double glazing, and his mother, Carole, 77, taught child-minders. They lived in a bungalow on a cul-de-sac. He was an unremarkable child, attending the local primary school, where he met his future wife, Laura. Both went to John Beddoes secondary in nearby Presteigne.

After leaving school, Oliver worked as a car salesman, as well as a special constable with Dyfed-Powys police. But then the lies began. According to those who knew him, Oliver forged a letter to the chief constable, faking the signature of a senior officer’s name, commending Jody Oliver’s excellent performance. They said he won a policing award.

Around 2002, aged 25, Oliver married Laura, a teacher, at a castle in Scotland. He set up the Advance Driving School, an off-road experience, and eventually met Colin McRae, the champion rally driver.

Oliver told McRae that he had got him a £3 million sponsorship deal with Coca-Cola. He also told Kris Meeke, a young driver, he had secured him €400,000 with Ryanair, claiming he was a friend of the chief executive. Neither deal existed. He faked a solicitor’s letter when the money failed to materialise.

The forgeries were found by police on Oliver’s computer, and in 2004 he admitted two charges of using false documents. He was sentenced to 200 hours’ community service and paid £720 in costs.

Johan the road safety expert and Jonathan the police officer

Oliver lost his job as a special constable, and in 2009 he started Coin Spinner, Coin Direct and Bet Marketing, companies that supplied slot machines, pool tables and games to pubs and cafés.

He told colleagues – falsely – that he was drinking buddies with Boris Johnson, that his father owned a casino in Monaco and that he had an ancestral pile. On his desk he kept a framed invitation to



Margaret Thatcher’s funeral. This was forged. He signed off his emails Johan Oliver. By 2010, his company accounts showed he owed tens of thousands of pounds to suppliers.

“If you met Jody, you wouldn’t wish to meet a nicer man,” said Anthony Brookes, who bought one of his companies. “But working with him turned out to be one of the worst experiences of my life.” Brookes said he had to pay off more than £30,000 in debt – undeclared by Oliver – when he bought part of Bet Marketing, as well as a further £23,000 of Oliver’s unpaid loans, for which Brookes was listed as the guarantor.

Oliver’s finances and frauds were beginning to spiral out of control. He developed a relationship with a car dealership, which said it ordered more than £600,000 worth of vehicles from him.

“He told Colin McRae that he had got him a £3m sponsorship deal

- BA pilot
- Cruise captain
- Car expert
- Millionaire
- Family man
- Police officer
- Boris Johnson’s mate

secret lives of the fantasist fraudster

They never arrived. Despite a civil court order, Oliver has not repaid the money. Dyfed-Powys police investigated and concluded there was no evidence of fraud.

He was also spending weekends away from his family, saying he was the co-owner of Vaughan Brothers Funeral Directors and did weekend “death duty”. The company had never heard of him.

It is understood Oliver was actually spending weekends as “Jonathan Kane” in Tredegar – 20 miles away – telling people he was a police officer.

In Newport, Jonathan the P&O cruise ship captain

In 2011, Oliver, now 34, went to Newport, calling himself “Jonathan Flynn Oliver”. He met Rhys Burgess, then 19, on a gay dating app. Oliver said he was 28, childless and “director of events” at Jaguar Land Rover. Oliver apparently put up photos of his children at their home, telling Burgess they were his sister’s.

Oliver gave Burgess a luxurious lifestyle. They were engaged in 2013, sending out invitations to their Caribbean wedding. In 2016, he told his wife’s father, David Hawkes, that his bank account had been hacked and he needed money. Hawkes transferred more than £100,000 to him over the course of three years. When he found out Oliver had lied, he contacted the police.

By 2018 Oliver had lost more than £130,000 gambling online and was taking out high-interest payday loans. At Coin Spinner, he reclaimed £23,000 in VAT on purchases that did not exist.

Then Oliver told Burgess he had been headhunted to be a cruise ship captain for P&O. At a Newport pub, he became “Captain Jonathan”. Wearing a uniform and lanyard, he offered discount cruise tickets to Burgess’s mother, grandmother and friends. He then began targeting pensioners. On December 30, 2018, passengers waited for taxis to pick them up for the cruise. They never arrived. The next month, Oliver was reported to police. The prosecution named 21 victims and calculated Oliver fraudulently obtained £320,315 over a year-long period.

His wife was told to look on Facebook – and saw photos of her husband and his fiancé in bed together, kissing and showing off engagement rings. The couple later separated.

When he was questioned by police, Oliver gave his name as “Jonathan Flynn Oliver, master mariner”. His wife, however, said he had never been on a cruise, let alone been a captain. He got seasick.

In Worcester, Joey the Volvo expert and Swedish speaker

Oliver was a wanted man – there were reports of people in Newport after him. Within days of his first police interview,

Oliver turned up 70 miles away in the Worcestershire countryside.

He got a job as a salesman at a Volvo garage, using a driving licence and passport with the name Joey Oliver. He told colleagues he had worked in the head offices in Sweden for 20 years, and talked on the phone in “Swedish”. A colleague covertly recorded him and put it through Google translate. It was nonsense. In August 2019, he was found guilty of VAT fraud relating to his gaming company in Brecon. He received a two-year suspended sentence and rehabilitation.

During his community service at a charity shop in Worcester, he gained the trust of the manager, Francesca Holder. Oliver said he could help her buy a new car, so she transferred £9,120 to him. He sent a receipt, but the car never arrived.

He also took more than £40,000 from Sylvia Tainton, 89, a former racehorse trainer he befriended.

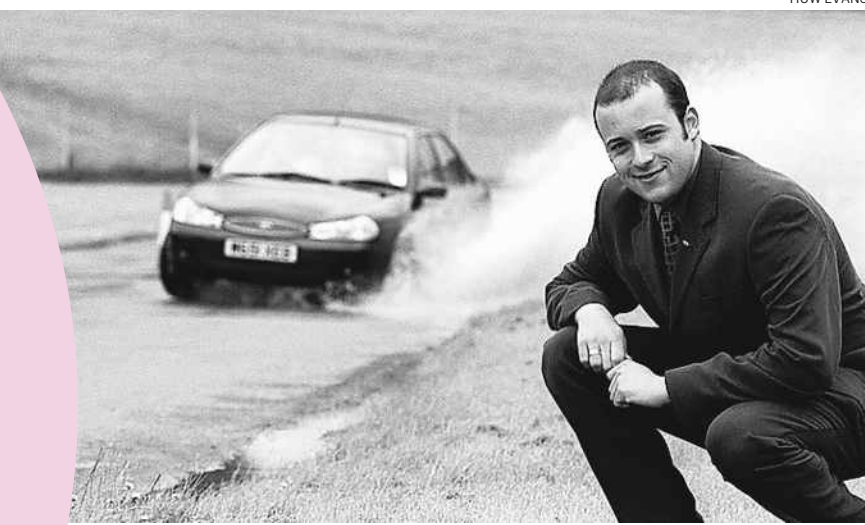
At the Volvo dealership, Oliver started taking days off for bereavements, when really he was being questioned by Gwent police. He told the police he had a brain tumour which impaired his memory.

On January 14, 2020, he was arrested at his home on suspicion of fraud relating to the cruises. Oliver admitted he did not have a brain tumour, but said he was having a mental breakdown.



“I lie in bed questioning every single thing he told me

Jody Oliver launched the Advanced Driving School, below. As Jon Oliver, he planned to marry Liam Britten, left, pretended to be a BA pilot and threw lavish parties in London’s Soho, below



In Bedford, Joe the top car dealer who was friends with ‘Mr Ford’

By spring 2020, Oliver was out on bail, under investigation for the cruise fraud and on a suspended sentence for the VAT scam. He moved 100 miles from Worcester to Bedford and got a job as Joe Oliver, a salesman at the Motorvogue dealership, where he became the top performer. He said he had worked for Ford in America as global head of events and had a personal relationship with “Mr Ford”.

“I’ve been in business for decades, but he hook, line and sinkered me,” said Ciro Ciampi, 46, a hotel owner and car enthusiast. He said he transferred £15,000 for three Abarths, Italian sportscars. By October, the cars hadn’t arrived. Ciampi called Motorvogue, who said Oliver had been found out for not being “Joe” and sacked. Ciampi reported it to the police.

Jon, the British Airways pilot who was left £30m in his grandmother’s will

In late 2020, aged 43, Oliver bounced between short-term rental properties and flat-shares in Bedford. He introduced himself as Jon Oliver, a 37-year-old British Airways pilot, whose flights were still grounded because of Covid. BA said that he had never worked for them.

He met Liam Britten, a 27-year-old barber, on the gay dating app Grindr. Oliver showered him with hundreds of pounds’ worth of gifts. On Valentine’s Day, Oliver proposed. Oliver told Britten that his parents had disowned him after he came out and that his grandmother – landed gentry – took pity on him and left him £30 million in her will. Oliver’s real grandmother owned a small haberdashery in Knighton. Oliver set up an Instagram account called @caption83. It read: “Happiest when I’m with my better half or at 41,000ft.”

Again, though, he was running out of money. So he told Britten’s elderly relatives he could get them access to BA holidays for a discount. It is believed they lost tens of thousands of pounds. He also said he could get them tickets to the British Grand Prix at Silverstone in July 2021. They spent £7,000 on four VIP tickets. When they arrived at the circuit, they discovered the tickets did not exist.

In London, Jon the mansion renovator and Soho socialite

At around the same time as the F1 scam, Oliver and Britten started spending more time in London. Oliver said he was renovating his £10.5 million house in Notting Hill. He showed Land Registry documents, but they were fake.

Oliver soon established a friendship with a wealthy couple. He took them for lunches at J Sheekey in Covent Garden and for cocktails at Sexy Fish, insisting on paying for everything. One morning, he

went in to HR Owen, a garage in Mayfair, and designed a 4x4 Rolls-Royce costing £380,000. Oliver and Britten’s wedding at the top of the Shard, according to Oliver, was planned and paid for.

It is understood Oliver sold acquaintances “discounted” first-class tickets on BA flights, faking emails from BA employees as proof of purchase. He is believed to have taken more than £30,000.

Some of his new friends were getting suspicious. In March, they invited Oliver to dinner at Le Garrick, a French restaurant near Soho, where they confronted him and called the police. According to those present, Oliver said Jody was his evil twin brother, and told officers that his name as Jonathan Flynn Oliver, BA pilot. He was released without arrest. Nobody in Soho saw him again.

In a caravan in Whitstable, lying about having cancer

Oliver left London with Britten the next morning, renting a caravan in Whitstable for two months. But now Britten was suspicious. Oliver showed him bank statements showing a balance of £1,628,040, with a BA monthly salary of £9,544, a scan of his passport reading “Jonathan Flynn Oliver” and “texts” from his twin.

He also began to pretend he had cancer. They moved back to Bedford, so Britten’s relatives could nurse him. Then, in August, Oliver said he was popping out – and never came back. Britten called the hospitals, then the police, and slowly found out that his fiancé, Jon Oliver, didn’t exist at all. “I should have left and got help ages ago,” Oliver wrote to Britten in an email. He had gone to the police station, where he was taken to court in Cardiff. Oliver continued: “I don’t even know who I am, and I can’t live like this.”

Britten is struggling to recover. He tried to take his own life and spent a month in a psychiatric hospital. “I lie in bed questioning every single thing he told me, whether it was true,” he said.

The end of the road

In August last year, Oliver was jailed for six years and one month for the cruise fraud. The investigations continued. In May, he pleaded guilty to 18 charges of fraud and theft while a car salesman in Worcester and relating to his father-in-law. He will be in prison until 2026.

At the sentencing last month, the judge called him a “devious and thoroughly dishonest character who will stop at nothing to defraud others”. Most of the victims are still out of pocket.

In May, Oliver was ordered by a judge to compensate those who he scammed. The court seized all his assets – just £351.

Listen to the podcast on *Stories of Our Times* on Tuesday



A MOUNTAIN OF ENTERTAINMENT

Stream blockbusters, new originals & hit shows

£6.99/MONTH * AD FREE * CANCEL ANYTIME

Subscription required. Auto-renews at £6.99/month unless cancelled. 18+. T&Cs apply. Price subject to change.



Rod Liddle

Great, we banished Christianity. Now we’re stuck in a moral wilderness



About three quarters of serving Church of England priests believe that the UK cannot now be called a Christian country, according to a survey last week. The survey didn’t relate if they thought that this was a good thing, all in all. The rhetorical question we should ask of them is: well, whose fault is that?

Perhaps among the 1,200 God-botherers who responded to the Times poll was the vicar who took the last CofE service I attended, funerals excepted, a few years ago. He had thrown into the congregation – about 13 souls – an inflatable globe, which we had to chuck about between us to demonstrate, somehow, the awfulness of food air-miles. I gave it a good thwack and nearly decapitated a gently dozing nonagenarian in an adjoining pew.

This infantilising exercise, more suited to a pre-school class, confirmed my suspicions that the Anglican church had jettisoned Christianity and replaced it with liberal grandstanding: we were now worshipping Ed Davey, or that Lib Dem woman who looks like Velma from *Scooby-Doo*. If God had been present in that frowzy church, I suspect he’d have made his excuses and left as soon as the inflatable globe came out. Or maybe earlier, when we all filed in looking grim and wondering why we weren’t at home washing the car.

The priests are correct, of course. Only 1.2 per cent of the population regularly attend our established church. They might, though, in humility, look over their shoulders at the rapidly growing numbers attending Pentecostal and evangelical churches – where those eternal biblical certainties are still enjoined upon the worshippers and there’s a good bit of hellfire and smiting of the wicked. But that sits very uneasily with a church that is entirely unjudgmental about human behaviour until it comes to migrants crossing the Channel in small boats. Oh, and Brexit. Everything else is just fine and dandy.

Much like the CofE bishop I talked to a decade or so ago, I am not entirely sure there is a God (“How the bloody hell would I know, Rod?” was his exact response). But I do know that the retreat of Christianity in our country – or more properly our collective retreat from it – has enormously diminished us, both as individuals and as a society.

The strictures of the old church may have been confining and rudimentary by our modern standards, but they provided a template by which we could live decent lives in a cohesive society: don’t nick stuff, don’t kill anyone, don’t shag your neighbour’s wife, put other people first, work hard and save your money and, more than anything, prostrate yourself before God. This last is crucial: the notion that we are not alone, that we are being watched and judged from above. Without it we subside naturally into narcissism, amorality and that most modern of phrases never far from our lips when we have done something venal, stupid or selfish: “Don’t judge me!”

The decline of Christianity isn’t the sole cause of our various, festering ills, but it has been a huge contributory factor. Remove taboos against divorce and you will, somewhere down the line, end up with a plethora of single mums who are skint and paid for by the state, while the children are much, much worse off mentally and educationally.

Much the same consequences attend the decline of traditional marriage and the tendency for people simply to live with each other – the relationships last less long and the children suffer. Nobody has very much time for deferred gratification any more, to judge from our perpetually rising levels of personal debt (which increased by £40 billion this year to a remarkable £1.8 trillion), nor for the good old Protestant work ethic, to judge from the ever increasing number of days we take off work.

Perhaps most importantly, we have become more individualistic as a society and more materialistic. Church is no longer the hub of a community, as it was until the early 1970s: today our favourite pastimes are buying more crap for ourselves, spending six hours each day on the internet and going down the gym. There is the anomie which results from being a more fragmented society, with each member out for himself, and in the place of those stern admonishments from Christianity a kind of vapid moral equivalence, which is at best hazy on the notion of right and wrong.

Humanists welcome the decline of the church. But they have provided nothing to put in its place. Two prominent God-bashers, Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, both rewrote the Ten Commandments to prove that we hadn’t needed them in the first place, but their efforts were transient and banal, the kind of uplifting guff you might read on a leaflet from your local NHS trust. The truth, I suspect, is that, however simplistic its shibboleths, Christianity inculcated in us a certain quiescence; it worked. We do not seem to be any happier now, do we?

Schools in danger of collapse



PHOTOBUBBLE: ROLAND WHITE

● So, farewell Richard Lynn, evolutionary psychologist and proponent of eugenics who has shuffled off this mortal coil at the age of 93. Lynn was terrified for the future of the human race, believing that governments were conniving in a

project to ensure that morons, halfwits and imbeciles outbred the rest of us and would come to dominate society, to our detriment. In an ironic twist, his death came very shortly after Grant Shapps had been appointed defence secretary.

A tale of bondage for the under-4s

When Millie visits her grandad in his cottage by the sea, they have terrific fun as he regales her with stories about all the old Pride marches he has been on.

This is the synopsis of a book aimed at pre-school children called *Grandad’s Pride*, written by a non-binary person called Harry Woodgate. It has caused a bit of a fuss recently – not least because one of the drawings involves two blokes in leather bondage gear ready for action, and some parents think this is pushing it a bit as reading matter for four-year-olds.

Sadly, I don’t know the denouement of the story. Perhaps Millie torches the cottage, or the chill wind of Odin descends from the north and that’s the end of both of them. Or maybe they have lashings of ginger beer, or just lashings.

Defoe, where is thy sting?

I wonder if Daniel Defoe is about to be cancelled. An article in *Isle* – Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment – excoriates the writer for failing to put any insects in *Robinson Crusoe*.

Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace writes: “Where are the mosquitoes, the wasps, the worms or the pests that should be ravaging Crusoe’s island?” Wallace works herself into a good old lather and then details a long list of further insects that Defoe totally failed to include in his story.

Next week: Shakespeare and the unforgiveable lack of voles, stoats and weasels in Birnam Wood.







THE SUNDAY TIMES
Wine Club
Celebrating 50 Years

25%
OFF

6 bottles or more + FREE delivery

NEW CUSTOMER OFFER

ORDER NOW:

sundaytimeswineclub.co.uk/25off6

New customers only. Free delivery usually £7.99. Ends 31/10/23 or while stocks last. 18+. Order acceptance and the contract between us is formed on despatch of products. See sundaytimeswineclub.co.uk/terms for full terms and conditions, and our privacy policy. The Sunday Times Wine Club is operated by Direct Wines Ltd. Registered in England and Wales. Registered Number 1095091. One Waterside Drive, Arlington Business Park, Theale, Berkshire, RG7 4SW. Unless otherwise stated, all wines contain sulphites. Savings based on individual bottle price.

SCAN HERE:



be**drinkaware**.co.uk

Pinprick test at birth that’s kept us on crest of a wave

Grateful families say a blood test to identify nine rare conditions in babies must now be stepped up to screen for even more

Shaun Lintern Health Editor

Nick Yates has spent the summer before his final year at Bristol University on a surfing holiday in Bali.

The 22-year-old knows, however, that things could have been very different. Yates has congenital hyperthyroidism, which, if left untreated, would have left him with dwarfism and severe mental disabilities.

The condition was caught by doctors when he was just five days old, thanks to the NHS newborn blood spot heel prick test given to all babies in the UK. It screens for nine rare but treatable conditions including congenital hyperthyroidism, which occurs in approximately 1 in 2,000 births a year in the UK.

Catching it early meant Yates was immediately put on daily medication to replace the thyroxine hormone his body needs to grow and develop, and which he continues to take to this day.

While Yates has thrived, some are not so fortunate. Britain is falling behind many European countries in the number of genetic and congenital conditions included in standard newborn screening.

Twenty European countries test for more conditions than the UK, with some testing for 20 or more. In some states in the US, as many as 40 conditions can be tested for.

Yates and his family believe the UK genetic screening programme should be expanded. He said: “To think that everything that I do and really enjoy in my life could have been completely different; that I wouldn’t really be here in my conscious self is quite a scary thought. I’ve never really thought about how lucky I am, but I’m bloody lucky. There are tests that would prevent other people suffering and, if I was on the opposite side, I would damn well want it for myself.”

Genomics England is about to launch a new £100 million pilot study specifically examining the benefits of genetic screening for newborn babies. The project will involve screening the genomes of 100,000 babies for as many as 200 conditions that can be confidently predicted – that’s about one in 12 newborn babies in England over two years.

The study will look at conditions that can be treated by medication or other means, and could form the evidence base for expanding screening in the UK. Any decision will ultimately be made by the UK National Screening Committee, which will weigh up the risks of population screening, false positives and potential overtreatments.

Louise Fish, chief executive of Genetic Alliance UK, said: “We would really like to see the UK moving in line with international best practice and if you’ve got 20

CHRISTOPHER L PROCTOR FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES



Nick Yates, with father Rob, was five days old when congenital hyperthyroidism was diagnosed and he was put on medication. Right, living life to the full in Bali



European countries, most of them screening for 20 conditions or more, clearly the international consensus is that it’s better to screen than not.”

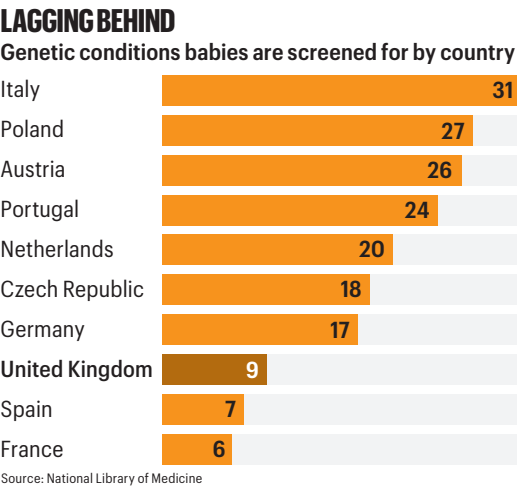
One condition not tested for in the UK is spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), which affects about 70 babies a year. SMA can be fatal but children must develop symptoms including physical and mental disabilities before they are treated.

Fish said some families whose conditions are not included in the heel prick test, such as those with SMA, were left with long-term impacts. “We find it really

heartbreaking. Many lifelong genetic conditions affect the child throughout their lives. They will need lifelong support from the NHS, from education services from wider social care services, they may never be well enough to live independently.”

There are more than 7,000 rare diseases and conditions that affect as many as four million people in the UK.

Yates’s father, Rob, a health economist at the Chatham House think tank, is delighted his condition never held him back. “We thankfully never had to see or



understand the counterfactual of what would have happened without it.”

For Yates, his daily tablets and annual blood test are now the only impact on his life. His mother, Jenny, a Labour councillor, said: “Nick’s a miracle of modern medicine.”

The health department said: “The UK National Screening Committee only recommends NHS newborn screening when the evidence proves the benefits outweigh any potential harms, ensuring children can receive treatment earlier for certain rare diseases.”

‘Teach all students climate change’

Ben Spencer Science Editor

University students should be forced to study climate change alongside their degrees, the new president of the British Science Association has said.

Professor Dame Jane Francis said it was important that “everybody, regardless of what they do in life, understand the basics of the science of our planet”.

The geologist, who is the director of the British Antarctic Survey, said too few people appreciated “the impact of humans and our lifestyle on the planet that we live on”. She added: “Climate change is quite a complex subject. It’s not just about science, it’s not just about numbers – it’s also about how humans interact with the planet and cause this imbalance.”

Francis, 66, proposed changing courses so that every student – even those studying arts and humanities – be taught about global warming in their first year. “I think it would be great if every university could teach a module on climate change, even if you’re doing something that’s really arts focused, something completely unscientific, so that everybody understands the science of climate change.”

Francis, who on Thursday will give her inaugural address at the British Science Festival in Exeter, added: “A lot of young people who I know are very concerned [about climate change]... and they really want to do something to help. They are going to inherit the planet that we’ve created, and they want to do something about it. So we need to educate young people about how we live on this planet, and how we could look after it better.”

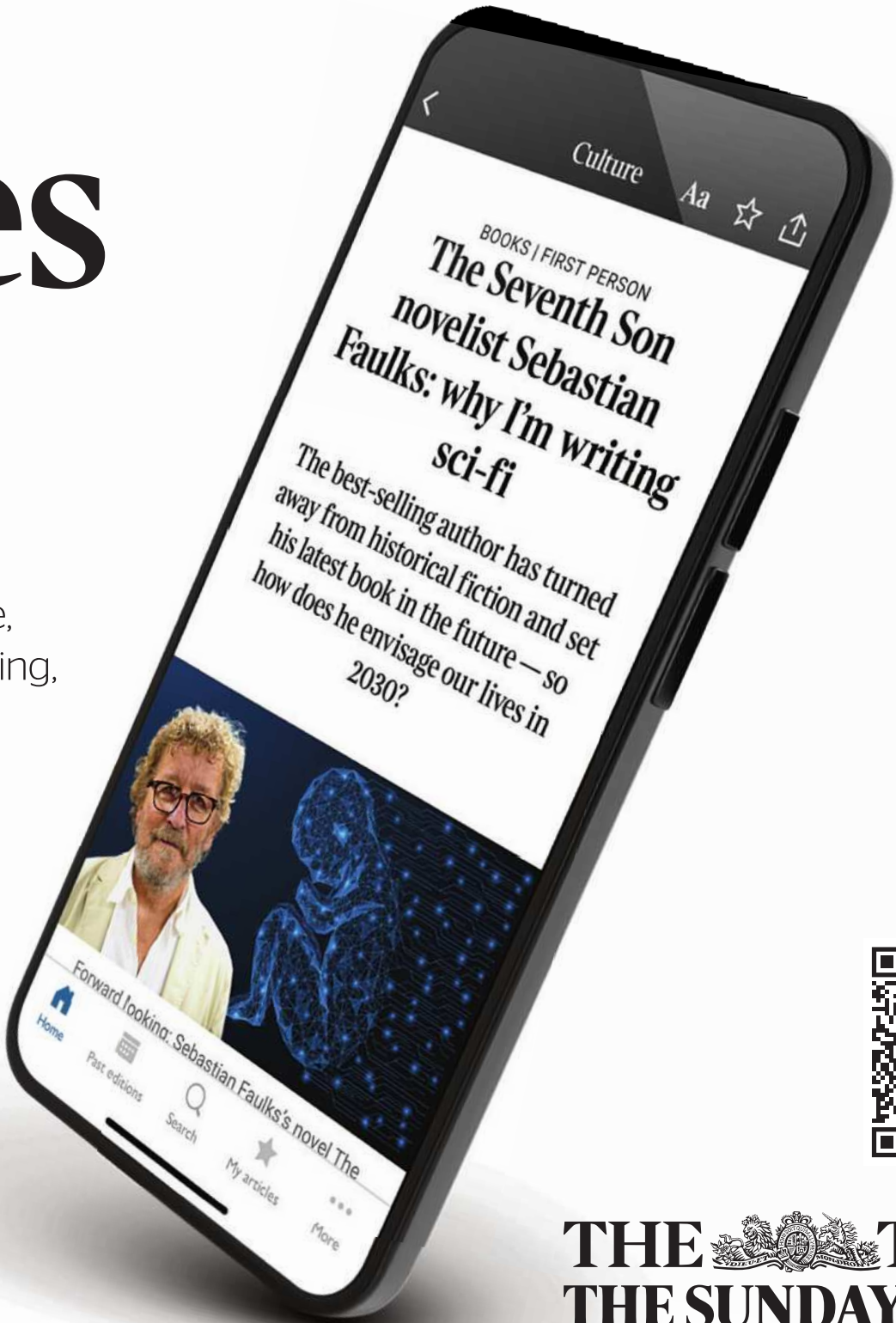
T DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTION

Read the latest stories on the go

A digital subscription keeps you informed wherever you are, whatever you’re doing. Live updates, newsletters, commenting, extra puzzles and more for less than £1 a day.

Try a digital subscription free for one month at thetimes.co.uk/trial or scan the QR code

LESS THAN
£1 A DAY



THE TIMES
THE SUNDAY TIMES
Know your times

WORLD NEWS

ILLUSTRATION: PETE BAKER



Nation on the verge of a nervous breakdown

A fortnight after an unsolicited kiss at the women's World Cup final, Spain remains gripped by a growing row over gender inequality

Matthew Campbell Motril

A few elderly parishioners had gathered in their southern Spanish town on Friday evening to hear Father José say Mass at the Divine Shepherd church. Noting the number of conflicts in the world, from the war in Ukraine to the fighting in Syria, the priest urged them to pray for peace.

Down the road, though, his own compatriots were at each other's throats. In the main square of Motril on the Costa del Sol, I had just watched young men hurling abuse at feminist protesters. The women replied with chants of "fascists and *machistas* [sexists] out!"

During the civil war in the 1930s at least one priest from Motril is thought to have been executed. Last week the seaside town, best known until very recently for its paper mill and greenhouse agriculture, found itself on the front line in another conflict: the Spanish sexism war.

The drama began on Monday, when Ángeles Béjar, 70, a retired hairdresser, locked herself into the church and said she was going on a hunger strike in protest over an "inhumane witch-hunt" against her 46-year-old son, Luis Rubiales, the president of the Spanish football association.

He grew up in Motril and became arguably its most infamous son after his actions following Spain's 1-0 victory over

“Soon we won't be able to say 'hola'”

the Lionesses in the Women's World Cup final in Sydney on August 20.

Rubiales, a former footballer, seized Jenni Hermoso, one of the winning players, by the head to pull her towards him and kiss her on the lips while medals were being handed out. At first he dismissed his critics as "idiots". Then he apologised but said the kiss was consensual. Hermoso denied this and said that she "felt vulnerable and a victim of an impulse-driven, sexist, out-of-place act without any consent on my part". She has also said that she felt pressure to publicly play down the incident.

Two weeks on, the outrage shows no sign of abating, particularly after Friday's ruling by Spain's sports council that Rubiales had committed a "serious offence" – but not serious enough to suspend him from his £578,000-a-year job.

As news of the ruling emerged, dozens of women who had already gathered for a protest in Motril's main square next to a giant honeysuckle bush began to chant, "Rubiales resign!" and, "If you touch one of us, you touch us all".

Young men on the edge of the throng began shouting "viva Rubiales" and "go home, feminist shit". Police intervened to prevent two men exchanging blows.

Fifa, football's world governing body, has suspended Rubiales – or "Rubi" to fans in his home town – for three months.

More than 80 Spanish players, including the women's team, who are due to play against Sweden on September 22, have said they will not represent their country unless he gives up the presidency.

Yesterday, though, he was clinging to the post, apparently unrepentant. Instead of an aggressor, he said he was the victim of an "unprecedented political and media lynching". It was reported that, although still in the job, the divorced father of three had been asked to return a company car and mobile phone.

Béjar said she was praying for her son when she began her hunger strike with an announcement that she would consume only isotonic drinks. By Wednesday, with the press camped outside the gates, she was reported to have fallen ill. What happened next caught waiting cameramen by surprise. She was spirited out of the church, apparently through a side exit, to be taken to hospital for tests. The next day she was released into the care of her son, who had raced to her bedside.

This extraordinary train of events might have been scripted by Pedro Almodóvar, the Spanish master of cinematic melodrama. What will the next act bring?

Hermoso has yet to file an official complaint about the kiss, or "peck", as Rubiales called it. But prosecutors at Spain's top criminal court said on Monday they had opened a preliminary investigation

on the grounds that it could constitute "sexual aggression".

For some commentators, Rubiales's oafish behaviour demonstrated just how *machista* Spain still is, a view reinforced by grim statistics about domestic violence. Murders of women by boyfriends or husbands have risen dramatically over the summer. The Spanish ministry of equality says that 19 women have died at the hands of partners since June – and 40 this year. The surge in domestic violence prompted Irene Montero, the equality minister, to schedule a "crisis meeting" tomorrow "to see how we can improve the institutional response".

Yet Spain may not be the worst offender in Europe. It has fewer incidences of physical or sexual violence against women than Denmark and Finland, according to surveys, although this may reflect the fact that it is more culturally acceptable in Scandinavian countries to talk about violence in couples.

In a further demonstration of Spain's divided attitudes to gender violence, on Friday Getafe signed on loan the Manchester United striker Mason Greenwood who has not played since he was charged with attempted rape, controlling and coercive behaviour and assault in October last year. The charges were dropped in February.

Following an internal investigation

Spain has been engulfed by fierce debate and protests since Luis Rubiales kissed Jenni Hermoso at the Women's World Cup. One activist's sign quoted the British feminist Gina Martin

“It was a moment of great emotion”

and external pressure, including from domestic violence campaigners, last month United announced that he would rebuild his career elsewhere. Greenwood, 21, had denied all charges.

Whatever its image as a bastion of machismo, Spain has taken leaps forward since the days of General Franco, when women were largely confined to the home and suffered abuses without laws to protect them.

The latest gender gap survey from the World Economic Forum ranks Spain as the 18th most equal country, just below the UK but above Canada, Australia, France and the United States.

Women are conquering Spanish politics: Socialist prime minister Pedro Sánchez has stuffed his cabinet with women. Three are deputy prime ministers, in charge of the economy, employment and environment. Other portfolios held by women include defence and justice.

This political advance is not only on the left. The most potent force on the right, according to polls, is Isabel Díaz Ayuso, conservative president of the Madrid region. She has joined government figures in urging Rubiales to resign. Yet some I met in Motril believed the fuss over Rubiales had gone too far.

"Soon we won't even be able to say 'hola' without getting into trouble," said Paco Gonzalez, 63, as he watched the

Brazil wary of its southern states after raids target 'neo-Nazis'

Stephen Gibbs Florianópolis, Brazil

At the end of an unpaved forest road above the southern Brazilian town of São Pedro de Alcântara is a modest hilltop villa, built in the style of a German chalet. The ideal place, a group of alleged neo-Nazis believed, for their secret annual meeting.

The eight men had no inkling they were under surveillance until Santa Catarina state police force officers, armed with assault rifles and shotguns, stormed the building as they slept.

The suspects were all dragged outside, handcuffed and arrested. Police then searched the villa and found a trove of Nazi propaganda alongside clear evidence of the group's links to the Hammerskins, a white supremacist group in the United States. A computer found at the site was reported to contain bomb-making instructions.

Identity checks revealed that one of the eight had a previous conviction for the

attempted murder of three young Jewish people in 2005. Another is suspected of a double killing. The men's lawyer has insisted they are all innocent – just a group of "old friends" who got together for a weekend.

The raid, last November, set off alarm bells in Brazil as evidence grows that neo-Nazi cells are increasingly active in its three southern states, Paraná, Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina. Investigators also say there is a connection between violence-eulogising groups and a surge in the number of school shootings over the past 12 months. On two occasions the assailants, one of whom killed four people, were wearing Nazi armbands.

"It's shocking," said Arthur Lopes, the detective who led the operation, at his office in Florianópolis. In front of his desk was a collection of Nazi artefacts, including a large black SS flag, swastika armbands, a copy of *Mein Kampf* and a club studded with nails, all seized by his team in recent months. He said he found it hard to

understand that "even nowadays ... these racists and Nazi apologists" were attempting to spread Adolf Hitler's propaganda.

He said much of his team's time was spent scanning the dark web, accessible via specialised web browsers, as well as chat sites for gamers, where recruiters stalk potential young converts.

Far-right extremism, usually twinned with white supremacism, is experiencing a worldwide resurgence. Earlier this year, the US intelligence community's annual threat assessment warned that neo-Nazis and other racist groups were now the "most lethal threat" faced by the United States. In Germany, 25 suspected neo-Nazi terrorists were arrested in December over an alleged plot to overthrow the government.

In Brazil, efforts to tackle the problem have been scant – until now. Some blame the recently departed right-wing government of Jair Bolsonaro for allowing a permissive environment.

Lopes's investigation team



Police display a trove of Nazi memorabilia from past raids

was established in January. Four experts looking for the extremist cells soon discovered "way more than we expected to find".

Santa Catarina, whose residents are mostly of German and Italian descent, appears to hold a particular attraction for Brazil's neo-Nazis. Most of those arrested in the latest raids are recent arrivals from other states and under the false impression they "will be comfortable here", said Jadel da Silva Junior, a state prosecutor.

One reason for that is the state's reputation as the whitest region in Brazil, with 84 per cent of its population describing itself as white.

Lopes said the neo-Nazis he is tracking have three main enemies: "Jews, black people and homosexuals."

In 1928, five years before Hitler came to power in Germany, the Brazilian Nazi Party was established near the city of Blumenau, 150km north of Florianópolis. It soon became the largest Nazi party anywhere outside Germany.

After the war, Brazil

became a refuge for as many as 4,000 former Third Reich officials, many of whom blended into the German communities in the south. Josef Mengele, the Auschwitz doctor notorious for his experiments on humans, lived in Brazil before dying in 1979 – apparently of a stroke – while swimming off the São Paulo coast. Gustav Franz Wagner, the second-in-command at the Treblinka and Sobibor concentration camps, died in 1980, supposedly of suicide, after avoiding arrest for decades.

More recently, there has been evidence that some prominent figures in Santa Catarina cling on to Nazi sympathies. In 2014, a police helicopter pilot flying over the city of Pomerode spotted a prominent swastika symbol in the bottom of a swimming pool at a home owned by Wandercy Pugliesi, a well-known history teacher in the city. He avoided punishment by changing the swastika to what looks suspiciously like the number 88, a white-supremacy symbol.

"They [the neo-Nazis] are

all lunatics. The sort of people who think the earth is flat," said Fernando Becker, a lawyer in Blumenau, a city famed for its Germanic architecture and annual Oktoberfest beer festival. "No ordinary people here are in the slightest bit proud of the Nazi past," he said.

Leonel Camasão, 37, a political activist in Florianópolis, said he feared Santa Catarina's unusual familiarity with fascism meant there was a risk that people did not take the neo-Nazi threat seriously. "No one really considers Nazism a dangerous thing. People even say, 'Oh, come on, my granddad was a Nazi'."

The LGBTQ community in the state, he said, certainly felt targeted, with one case of male rape – a suspected neo-Nazi recruitment ceremony dare – being investigated. "These people are a clear threat," he said.

Brazil remained vulnerable to a growing international phenomenon, Lopes agreed. "This is the kind of conduct which, without control, will only get worse."



rally on Friday. “[Rubiales] may have behaved like an idiot, but the kiss was a result of euphoria after the victory.”

A driver at the local paper factory who claimed to know Rubiales and did not want to be named said: “They’re crucifying that poor man. It’s ridiculous to call a kiss like that a sexual aggression. Of course . . . he should have controlled himself, and, if he couldn’t, he should do a course to learn how.”

Some women also expressed sympathy. “It was a moment of great emotion, he shouldn’t resign for that,” said Marie Carmen, 50, who works in a giant greenhouse producing tomatoes.

Whether Rubiales resigns or is forced to step down, the truth is that, much as it has turned its back on the medieval Franco decades, old habits die hard in Spain. Last week San Luis de Albondón, a village near Granada, came under attack over the prizes it handed out in its summer fiesta: men got a bottle of alcohol while the women got cleaning cloths.

A few years ago, a nationwide association for gender equality began holding meetings in which men were encouraged to discuss their sexist prejudices – and overcome them. As Miguel Lázaro of the Men’s Association for Sexual Equality put it: “Every man is in need of an internal revolution.” For the time being, the country seems more divided than ever.

Sighs of relief on Parisian pavements as e-scooters are kicked to the kerb

Katie Gatens Paris

Serigne Niasse is on safari in the 12th arrondissement of Paris in search of the nearly extinct *trottinette*. He rounds a corner to find nothing but rows of bikes. Then a few streets away he finds them. Huddled by the side of the road are a pair of long-necked mint-green rental e-scooters, or *trottinettes*, two of the last left in the city. Niasse, who works for Tier, pulls over and stows them in his van; their life in Paris has ended.

Last Friday all 15,000 public e-scooters, which were rented out by the minute via an app, were evicted. Paris, once the biggest market in Europe, it is the first major city to outlaw them. Opponents of e-scooters point out that the ban only affects shared vehicles; there are still about 500,000 private e-scooters on the streets, which are faster, unregulated and often do not have lights.

For Assia Younes, a taxi driver from Lebanon, the ban could not have come soon enough. “They’re dangerous,” he says as a scooter whizzes past us at a junction. “They ride on the road with a motor and they

have no licence plate. You see people riding with their children in front of them ... teenagers joyriding.”

In London scooters must be taxed and registered, and riding on the pavement is illegal. No such laws exist in France. Younes has seen a pedestrian violently knocked over by a *trottinette* skipping a red light. “It traumatises you. It makes you scared to step out on the streets.”

Much fury has been directed at the *trottinettes* since they were introduced to Paris in 2018. Initially they were unregulated. As their numbers grew beyond 40,000, many were dumped in canals or strewn across pavements. Pedestrians felt terrorised. At the worst point in 2019 there were 40 accidents in the city each day.

The mayor, Anne Hidalgo, called the situation “anarchy in the streets”. Regulations came into effect in 2020, limiting e-scooter numbers, providing parking areas and reducing operators to three companies (Tier, Lime and Dott) but the damage to their reputation was done.

Paris police say e-scooters contributed to three deaths and 459 injuries in 2022. In a City Hall referendum in April,

89 per cent of voters wanted them removed; but the poll had a turnout of only 7 per cent and many claimed that City Hall had an agenda.

The referendum was held on the day of the Paris marathon, making it difficult to vote in person. Digital voting, which would have attracted younger voters, was denied and turnout among those aged 18 to 35 was low.

Hidalgo, who campaigned against the e-scooters, hailed

a “victory for local democracy”, saying: “When we give Parisians the chance to speak up, they turn up.” The transport minister, Clément Beaune, pointed out that Hidalgo failed to regulate the scooters and branded it a “democratic flop”.

“More than 100,000 people took part in the vote, which was a first for Paris,” said David Belliard, deputy mayor for public space, transport and mobility. “Self-



Katie Gatens on one of the last rental scooters. Paris has banned 15,000 – but 500,000 private machines are still on the streets

service scooters posed a number of problems in terms of personal safety, particularly for the most vulnerable. Another problem was the cluttering up of the public space.”

Could private e-scooters be targeted next? Belliard said a 2019 national law championing green transport did not allow local authorities to ban them. “Another law would have to be passed to that effect,” he said. “Personal e-scooters pose less of a problem because they are not parked in public; their owners take them to their offices or homes. Owners are more careful because these machines belong to them.”

Later I find Felix Lorenz, a 28-year-old banker from Germany, parking his Tier *trottinette* at the Arc de Triomphe. “I live a 20-minute walk away and use it to get to work,” he said. “The metro is dirty and so packed.” He can understand people’s frustrations. “When kids leave them knocked over, it ruins the image of the city.”

The e-scooter operators say they are confused by City Hall’s purge. In 2021 Hidalgo launched a €250 million scheme to make Paris “100 per cent cycleable” in

five years. “It makes little sense,” said Nicolas Gorse, head of Dott. “City Hall is banning scooters but they’re pushing for green mobility – it seems contradictory.”

At the Dott warehouse in Aubervilliers, on the outskirts of Paris, mechanics work on e-bikes. In the corner, scooters are stored pending redeployment in cities such as Lille and Bordeaux.

Gorse said it was too early to tell if jobs would be lost because of the ban. A transport minister in Brussels hinted that the Belgian capital could scrap e-scooters too after a flurry of accidents. However, since the Paris referendum Dott has won tenders in Madrid, Rome and London. “Usage is increasing everywhere.”

On the first day of the ban, Paris’s streets were noticeably emptier. Gorse is nostalgic. “We just hope that some day we will come back to Paris because we do believe it makes sense,” he said. After years of war with City Hall, Dott hopes to increase the number of shared e-bikes before next year’s Olympics. “The good thing is that this is the end of the conflict,” he said. “Now we can all move on.”

A towering figure to take down Trump? Basketballing 6ft 6in ‘everydad’ could be a slam dunk if he steps onto the court

David Charter Richmond

Glenn Youngkin walks to the back of the grand foyer in the Virginia governor’s mansion to point out his favourite painting in a building steeped in American history.

“That’s young George Washington, while he was a colonel in the Virginia militia,” Youngkin says, gesturing at the large canvas. “That’s where he began to develop the reputation of being immortal. He’s retreating from a battle and his jacket was filled with bullet holes, as was his hat, and the rumour began that he was destined and protected.”

As Youngkin, 56, proceeds to a room adorned with the portraits of three more Virginia-born US presidents (Jefferson, Madison and Monroe), it is hard not to see a pattern emerging.

His state is known as the Mother of Presidents for providing the most (eight) of any in the country. The question is, will the genial 74th governor try to join them?

In 2021, Youngkin, a wealthy late entrant into politics after a career in business, self-funded his victorious primary contest against some better-known Republican opponents, then – a year after Joe Biden won Virginia by ten points in the presidential election – claimed an unexpected victory by gaining the governor’s mansion.

The alchemy of his campaign – based around education, typically a Democratic battleground – has made him an instant star of the Republican Party, a position confirmed when a slew of oddball and extreme candidates promoted by Donald Trump bombed in last year’s midterm elections.

Youngkin was not on the stage in Milwaukee for last month’s debate between pretenders to the 2024 Republican presidential nomination but is viewed by some as having a better chance than any of them to topple Trump should he throw his hat in the ring.

With a favourability rating of 48 per cent among Virginians in a survey last week for Roanoke College – compared with 43 per cent for Biden and 30 per cent for Trump – Youngkin offers a blueprint for conservatives in how to win and govern in a polarised political environment.

So what’s his trick? “Well, I’m not sure it’s a trick, I actually think it’s the opposite,” he says, emphasising the connection he seeks to make with a range of voters, in contrast to the leading Republican candidates, Trump and Ron DeSantis, the Florida

governor.

“I think it’s first having a clear view of where you want to go and how you’re going to get there. It’s rested, in my case, in commonsense conservative beliefs, but also my business background. As a result I’ve spent a lot of time explaining why we’re doing what we’re doing, and where we’re going, and how we’re going to get there, and how people can track our progress along the way. I think that this is a requirement today in politics, but particularly when you have to convince folks that might otherwise not have voted for you. And it works.”

The first thing that strikes you about Youngkin is his height, which his staff say is 6ft 6in (2m) – though it was recorded as 6ft 7in back in his college basketball days at Rice University in Houston. The next obvious thing is how engaging he is in conversation and how comfortable he seems in his skin.

After an MBA from Harvard he made his fortune (said by Forbes in 2021 to be about \$440 million) at the private equity Carlyle Group, where he rose to be co-chief executive.

He developed a relatable neighbourly persona during his first political campaign in 2021 by donning a fleece gilet. He is also an evangelical Christian whose beliefs were nurtured during a stint in London in the early 2000s when he attended Holy Trinity Brompton church, leading Youngkin and his wife Suzanne – with whom he has four children – to found their own Holy Trinity church in their Virginia basement.

“He’s connected to some important constituencies in the Republican electoral base,” says Bob Holsworth, a Virginia political analyst. “He prays at every meeting. He’s very open about his faith and is well liked by evangelicals, and that helped him very much in getting the Republican nomination.”

Youngkin built his winning coalition on support from suburban parents, promising them greater control over educational decisions. He seized on discontent at pandemic masking and remote learning, and liberal policies such as access to school lavatories for self-identifying transgender pupils following a well-publicised row over a sexual assault on a 14-year-old girl by an older boy wearing a skirt.

His Democratic opponent, Terry McAuliffe, failed to grasp the mood and helped to sink his own campaign when he declared: “I don’t think parents should be telling schools what they should teach.”

Youngkin now holds



AL DRAGO/BLOOMBERG

“He won where a slew of oddballs failed



Glenn Youngkin played basketball at university in Texas. Top, on the campaign trail with his wife, Suzanne

Tim Marshall

A ‘coup belt’ is cinching tighter around Africa, and there is far more than geography to blame



GETTY IMAGES; AP

two years before the first Tuareg rebellion broke out to create a separate state.

We call it a coup d'état, a blow against the state or government. It is useful shorthand but can obscure a rationale for the blow – that sometimes there is barely a state to overthrow, only an apparatus of government used to make money.

This is the case in parts of Africa where the legacies of colonialism, ethnic rivalries, corruption, continued outside meddling and geography have combined to create states with little to glue them together and much to tear them apart.

Last week's military coup in Gabon against President Bongo featured some of these underlying causes. Others, such as in Mali, have them all.

Corruption and poor governance exist in many parts of the world but because of these exacerbating factors, Africa is more vulnerable than other regions.

Since 1950 there have been more than 480 coup attempts globally, almost half of them have been in Africa, of which more than 100 succeeded, according to data compiled by the American researchers Jonathan Powell and Clayton Thyne.

Forty-five of Africa's 54 nations have experienced at least a single coup attempt in the same time frame. Seventeen of the 18 coups worldwide since 2017 have been in Africa, the majority have been in west Africa and the Sahel.

After each, other countries call for a “return to democracy” but there is rarely an admission that what was overthrown was typically far from democratic.

In Gabon, the family of the deposed president had ruled since 1967 via fraudulent elections and brutal repression, pillaging the country for 55 years. The country's oil reserves bring in billions of dollars each year and yet there is widespread poverty. Little wonder, then, that there was dancing in the street at news of the coup even as the UK condemned the “unconstitutional military takeover”.

Despite having a population made up of more than 50 ethnic groups, Gabon has forged a sense of national identity, a quality lacking in Mali.

There, as in other Sahelian countries, the government's writ runs out when the concrete does, and rural areas receive little to no help from central government. This was among the contributing factors in the Malian coups of 2020 and 2021.

The Sahel is particularly prone to coups because of its geography. Climate change is increasing the desertification of northern regions, which now blend into the Sahara desert. Some are landlocked, all are corrupt, rich in resources but with impoverished populations. It is a recipe for combustibility. Any government that cannot bring security risks being overthrown by military officers, many of whom are also corrupt.

History is also a major contributing factor. In 1960, when the French withdrew, the straight lines they had drawn in the sand bequeathed the newly independent countries degrees of instability they have yet to overcome. In Mali, the lighter-skinned Tuareg peoples of the north had been fighting the darker-skinned Bambara from the middle Niger valley for centuries. Now they were told they were in the same nation. It took just

NIGER



MALI

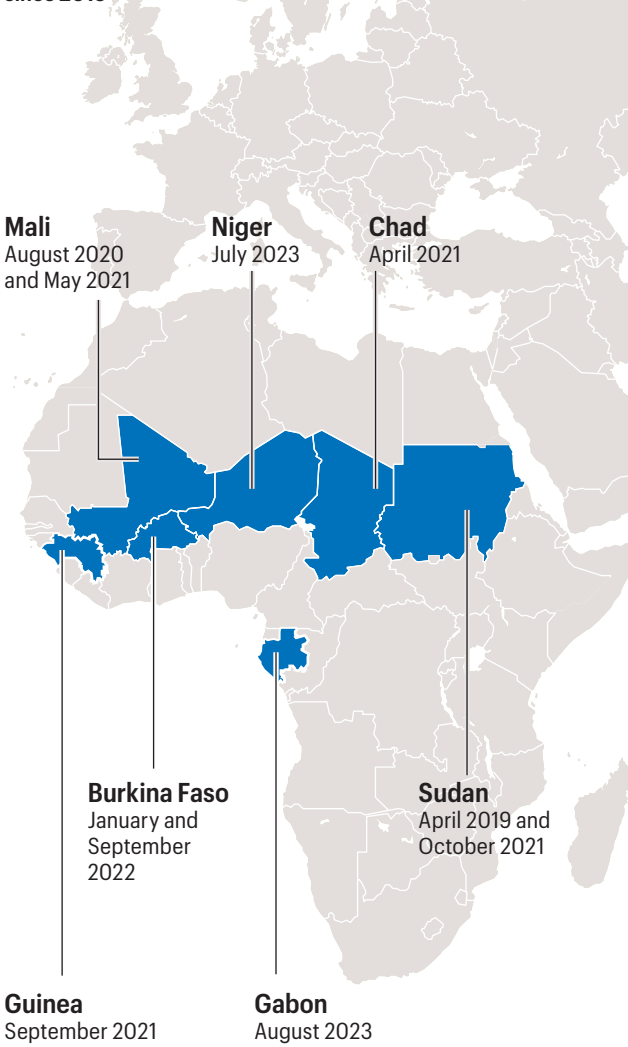


BURKINA FASO



AFRICA'S COUP BELT

Successful coups since 2019



SUDAN



GABON



COUP CONTAGION

Not all coups involve arresting the leader. In 2021, Chad saw a “dynastic coup”. After the death of President Déby, the army simply declared his son “interim president”. France, conscious that Chad hosts French troops, said it was justified for security reasons.

Even as independence spread across the region, France engineered ways of maintaining influence. The key was the CFA franc, a currency that deprived nations of monetary sovereignty. Governments were required to deposit half their foreign reserves in Paris, while trade deals were enforced benefiting France. The CFA was retired in 2020.

Also retiring (hurt) is most of the French military mission against jihadist insurgencies in the region. At its height there were 5,000 French troops deployed at the invitation of five Sahelian governments, but after the coups in Mali and Burkina Faso they were told to leave and their position in Niger is now uncertain. Since 2012 France has spent roughly €1 billion a year on the operation. The human cost has also been high with 59 French soldiers killed, 52 of them in Mali.

Last week President Macron described the operation as a success telling Le Point: “They have prevented the creation of caliphates a few thousand kilometres from our borders”, and arguing that without intervention, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger might no longer exist. Either way, public opinion at home has turned against further military involvement.

This history is why coup leaders can easily portray an overthrown president as a puppet of France, as happened in July in Niger, where the coup was quickly followed by an attack on the French embassy. The new leaders may or may not throw out French and US troops and invite in the Russians, in the form of a Wagner-type group of mercenaries. It depends on who makes the better offer.

The riches earned from uranium, iron ore and bauxite will not reach ordinary people after a coup. French forces deployed in several countries were insufficient to suppress insurgencies. If Russians replace them, it will be only to guard the latest dictator from the next coup attempt or attack by terrorist groups. A UN report this week said that Islamic State has doubled the Malian territory it controls in under a year. The “state” will not protect the people, so why should they have allegiance to it?

Most countries, especially those with growing economies, do not suffer frequent coups, but the vast region stretching from Sudan to the Atlantic is becoming an exception. Coups are contagious countries on the coast risk infection. The legacy of colonialism and continued foreign interference are in the dock, but the political and military classes in the Sahel and elsewhere must also take responsibility for their failures and for their greed.

The Future of Geography, by Tim Marshall, is published by Elliott & Thompson at £20

Editorial, page 20

‘I’m glad I defied the bombs and stood firm in Kyiv’

Christina Lamb
Chief Foreign Correspondent

When Melinda Simmons packed a punchbag among her baggage to take up her first ambassadorship in Kyiv four years ago, she had no idea the use it would get. Ukraine then was a country best known for wheat production, corruption and surrogate babies and had just elected a comedian as president.

“I imagined pitching innovative new trade initiatives,” she says, laughing, “and thought it exciting having a new president untested in government and politics.”

Instead she found herself at the centre of the biggest war in Europe since the 1945 watched as the president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, became a worldwide hero. She also got through three British prime ministers, a pandemic and six bottles each of nail varnish in the blue and yellow of the Ukrainian flag.

That punching bag would become key to releasing tension after night after night of interrupted sleep as Russian missiles rained down on the Ukrainian capital.

Far from passing round the Ferrero Rochers at receptions for British investors, Simmons was at the centre of efforts to co-ordinate more

than £140 billion in aid and military assistance to Ukraine, to which the UK is the second biggest donor.

Today, the 57-year-old mother of two returns home after one of the most remarkable diplomatic postings in recent history, having become a Dame, inspired a Melinda croissant at a Kyiv bakery (red icing to represent her mass of auburn curls) and been given a pair of boxing gloves signed by Olena Zelenska, the first lady.

She has amassed 83,500 followers for her tweets documenting her life in the Ukrainian capital. “3 air raid sirens in 90 minutes...” she sighed in one last week.

“I wanted to give people not in Ukraine a window into what it's like by talking in live time,” she explains in her final interview before leaving. “I'm not being judge-y but it's impossible to understand outside the country, who on earth can imagine running from bombs, etc?”

Describing the air raids as “a daily assault on peace of mind”, she says, “You live in a constant state of anticipation of the need to be within four walls so no one sleeps properly and everyone has a little bit of an on-edge thing. Even in conversation with ministers you can see how tired they are if we have all been up the previous night.

“**Loud noises make me jump**”

The outgoing UK ambassador to Ukraine Melinda Simmons boxes to ease stress. Right, with President Zelenskyy



For me the loneliest moments are being in the shelter and you can hear the noise and you can hear it close by and you know perfectly well that it could be closer still to you.”

Her love for the country is clear – the posts on air raids are interspersed with photos of beetroot pizza in Lviv and delicious watermelon from liberated territory, and her local park full of women and children as the men are away fighting – a situation she knows only too well, having been separated from Steve, her own husband, first by Covid then by war.

What kept her going was

the punchbag – 45 minutes every morning after emerging from the shelter. “It's never seen as much use as in the last two years,” she says with a smile. “That tension has to have an outlet and for me it has been exercise.”

Simmons has also had counselling – something offered to all her embassy staff. Such is the stress, however, that on short visits back to the UK “any noise made me jump and a couple of times I have burst into tears. Motorbikes backfiring I can't take it or being in crowds – once or twice I've been on the Tube and got off



as being around too many people is hard.”

Since the Russian build-up on the borders two years ago and the invasion on February 24 last year, she has barely left – relocating to Warsaw at the outbreak of war, witnessing the mass exodus across the Polish border, then two months later becoming one of the first ambassadors to return.

“I am absolutely clear: on the ground presence has been worth paying the price of living with that insecurity of bombs and missiles to be in the important and unique position to report back how

you are feeling it and how Ukrainians are responding to our help and also so our government has day-to-day clarity of the state of need.”

In the process she moved from representing Britain's interests to becoming one of Ukraine's biggest cheerleaders in and out of Zelenskyy's office. “The balance tipped,” she admits. Living through a Russian invasion would be a challenge for any diplomat but for Simmons it is personal.

Simmons is Jewish, born in the east end of London. Her father's family is from Poland but on her mother's side she has Ukrainian great-grandparents born and raised in Kharkiv. On a visit there as ambassador she tracked down the names of four relatives – an uncle, aunt and two children – on a memorial wall at Drobyskyi Yar, the site of a horrific massacre in 1941.

She hears of such horrors in today's war first hand through the embassy's witness testimony programme under which survivors of rape by Russians have come to speak, as have some of the few children rescued from Russian abduction. “It's awful listening to women and girls talk about what's been done to them – and some men and boys – and all deserve investigation but I would say

hands down the hardest are ones with children brave enough to tell us about their abductions. When you talk to them it makes you want to throw up. The international community has been too slow to do anything about it and we're talking about over 19,000 kids.”

It is a rare moment when her diplomatic mask slips. For the most part she is Tiggerish in her optimism that she will be back in a liberated Ukraine. “I feel quite triumphant,” she adds, “because I think the UK has done such an extraordinary thing in the way we helped Ukraine, it's been a long slog and we've stuck right there with them. I feel bursting proud right now.”

Any talk of a deal under which Ukraine would cede territory infuriates her and she insists that the UK or the rest of Europe cannot risk wavering in their support. For now she has some sleep to catch up on, two sons, both at university, to see and “a husband to get to know again”.

The first thing she did on crossing the border to Poland was to erase her Ukraine air raid app. “I need to sleep and I need to learn how to sleep without half an ear cocked for noise and then I can't wait to get stuck back in whatever's next.”

NEWS REVIEW

A year after Elizabeth’s death, the monarchy is still being buffeted by storms Andrew and Harry, and public support for the institution can’t be taken for granted, argues royal historian *Ed Owens*. To revive the Firm’s long-term appeal, the King must slim it down and make it far less secretive

ROYALS IN A

If you still doubted that the British monarchy was adrift a year on from Queen Elizabeth II’s death, two incidents in the past week highlighted the problem. First, there was an illustration of how knotty and unresolved the role of Prince Andrew remains when the disgraced Duke of York was seen travelling to church in Scotland with the Prince and Princess of Wales.

Is Andrew being brought back into the fold, as some have suggested? Or is he facing a lifetime in royal Siberia, as other briefings indicated?

Second, Prince Harry is expected in Britain this week for the ceremonies that will mark the year since Elizabeth’s death. Yet his alienation from the family remains a running sore on the House of Windsor. His latest broadside against the monarchy comes in the form of (another) Netflix series, *Heart of Invictus*, in which he alleges that he didn’t have a “support structure” around him and that no one helped him deal with the trauma of returning from his tour of duty in Afghanistan.

What to do about Andrew? What to do about Harry? These are just two problems plaguing a monarchy that is arguably stuck in a rut. I’m a royal historian by trade, but it was my sense of an institution in urgent need of thoughtful reform that led me to write my new book: *After Elizabeth: Can the Monarchy Save Itself?*

Individual members of the royal family remain popular – a post-coronation poll from Ipsos Mori showed that 63 per cent of Britons approved of the work the King was doing. The Prince and Princess of Wales are more popular still, while the late queen topped the charts.

But the institution itself is much less popular. The monarchy’s poll ratings are at their lowest point since surveys began. A poll by the National Centre for Social Research at the time of the coronation found that 45 per cent of respondents suggested that the monarchy should either be abolished, was “not at all important” or “not very important”.

This disillusionment is most acutely felt among Britain’s younger generations. So what should the monarchy do next?

Judging from the press coverage that has examined his first year on the throne, our new sovereign isn’t entirely sure how he should proceed.

On the one hand, palace sources told The Sunday Times recently that the King intended to be the “steady-as-she-goes” monarch: his reign would emphasise continuity with that of Elizabeth II. But other trusted sources told the Daily Mirror there was a growing sense of urgency in the royal household.

Charles is understood to have organised a summit with William and Catherine to discuss the future of the monarchy, recognising, it seems, the need to set out a clearer vision for his reign, in case he becomes merely a caretaker king.

The vision that has been outlined for the future of the monarchy – a combination of Commonwealth and climate activism – does not inspire much confidence.

The Commonwealth, although much beloved by the late queen, is a rudderless organisation that lacks a clear sense of purpose. The organisation was at its most influential in its opposition to the apartheid regime in South Africa which col-

lapsed in 1994. But since then, with countries such as Barbados and Jamaica pulling away from the crown, its achievements have been of little consequence. Without Elizabeth II, it lacks the central figurehead who did so much to keep it going for so long.

Meanwhile, the question of how we act to slow climate change is fast becoming divisive. Until now, the King has adopted a more outspoken position on this topic than his mother would have risked. No 10 had to ask him not to attend the Cop27 climate meeting in Egypt last year.

This has some benefits, demonstrating that he is in touch with one of the most pressing political concerns of the day. But environmental policy is increasingly polarising politically and, if the King is not careful, he may find himself at odds with large sections of the British public and their elected representatives.

What seems to be missing at Buckingham Palace is an honest assessment of the scale and nature of the challenge facing the monarchy. There doesn’t appear to be any real understanding of why support for the institution is evaporating among the young, nor the amount of modernisation required.

Until recently, the monarchy was more popular among younger people. In 2013, some 72 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds expressed a desire to keep it and thought the institution was here to stay. A decade on, support for the Crown among the young has halved. At YouGov’s last count, 36 per cent of under-25s expressed sup-

port for kingship, while 40 per cent favoured abolition.

In the past, people tended to become more conservative as they aged and, the theory went, more royalist. This doesn’t appear to be happening today: those aged between 27 and 42 have instead expressed growing dissatisfaction with

the monarchy. By recognising that the values and beliefs of Britain’s under-45s are changing, with many becoming and staying more socially progressive than in the past, we can begin to see that the monarchy’s problems are partly structural.

The younger generation’s rejection of

the institution is partly informed by their rejection of the wider status quo. After all, it’s the younger generations who feel they have been on the wrong end of politics over the past 15 years, so it should come as no surprise that the popularity of the monarchy, an institution at the very core of our political system, has suffered.

The Harry and Andrew sagas haven’t helped. Both have given public interviews with damaging consequences for the crown. Both have the potential to exact further damage.

Andrew has become the ultimate “hanger-on”, rejecting his older brother’s request that he vacate Royal Lodge at Windsor. The King surely knows that this case of stropmy self-indulgence can only cause further harm, and that any attempt to rehabilitate Andrew would be tone deaf.

Harry and Meghan may be unpopular among older people in Britain, but they still have a large following among the younger generation that the Windsors need to woo. Dynamic, handsome and symbolically representative of multi-racial Britain, the couple should have been central to the monarchy’s future plans. Instead, they are a thorn in its side.

For now, the King has little option but to leave Harry in the cold, while keeping the door open lest he and Meghan decide they have had enough of their lives in Montecito and that reconciliation with the rest of the royal family is something they really want.

Even William, who rarely puts a public

foot wrong, found himself on the wrong side of public opinion recently when he opted not to travel to Sydney to watch the England Lionesses play in the World Cup final.

Harry and Meghan’s departure has also drawn attention to how overstretched the remaining Windsors are in terms of their public engagements.

The themes of duty and service were popularised by Elizabeth II’s grandfather, George V, when his monarchy was threatened by the political turbulence that followed the First World War and crowned heads of state toppled across Europe.

The monarch and his advisers recognised that a radical PR strategy was needed. They hit on the idea that the royal family would dutifully carry out new forms of civic and charitable work across society as a way of reassuring the public of their value, therefore justifying their privileged existence.

This version of a self-sacrificing monarchy met with great success and was in turn championed by Elizabeth II. A big royal family made up of the late queen’s immediate kin, but also many royal aunts, uncles and cousins undertook a huge range of activities across society on a scale not seen before.

Now, under pressure from the public to rationalise the costs of running what is already a significantly smaller royal family, the King has no option but to scale back, so that the monarchy’s work is more manageable for those undertaking it and better targeted at areas of national life where it can make a real difference.

And yet hope is not lost. The King should look to previous renewals of the monarchy, such as that overseen by George V. What, then, might he do to give his reign a clear sense of purpose and broaden the crown’s appeal among the young?

Charles could start by fully embracing his role as the symbol of our democracy. Since the 1930s, the British monarch has been celebrated by royalists as the defender of our democratic values and freedoms. And yet for all her successes, Elizabeth II struggled to reconcile herself to the implications of this role during her long reign.

She allowed a culture of royal secrecy to build up within our political system that concealed – and continues to obscure – the influence wielded by the sovereign and heir to the throne over government decision-making. Opaque constitutional procedures such as “Queen’s Consent” (now King’s Consent) should be demystified and historians given access to the papers of Elizabeth II, so that we might finally understand the role she played behind the scenes.

Such a move to “open up” the constitution would appeal especially to a younger generation that has become increasingly distrustful of the individuals who run the country. It would see the King set a powerful example of democratic transparency and accountability.

Next, he could begin to uncouple the monarchy from those areas of public life that are becoming increasingly fraught and politicised. Climate and environment, if handled clumsily, pose a grave risk to the crown. The same can be said of the interest the royal family has taken in food security – in his first Christmas broadcast, the King expressed concern for recipients of food aid.

Finally, Charles should downsize the dynasty once and for all, making it smaller and more agile. The focus should be the King, William and their consorts – and that’s it. Princess Anne could, at long last, be allowed to retire. The other, lesser-known figures would fade from view.

This process would not only enable the monarch to free up several royal residences that could be opened to the public but also significantly reduce running costs, with far fewer staff on the payroll and trips abroad.

Charles and his heir should be leading this modernisation drive together. To wait for William’s succession before implementing real change would be a disaster: there is no guarantee that when that time comes Britain will be in better shape. The country is calling out for change now.

After Elizabeth: Can the Monarchy Save Itself?, by Ed Owens is published on September 14 (Bloomsbury, £25)

At last, Zurich’s gnomes can see they’re at vault

Secrecy-obsessed Swiss banks claim to be cleaning up their act, but the billions keep flowing, writes *Oliver Bullough*

When Colm Kelleher, the Warrington-born chairman of the Swiss bank UBS, was at Oxford, he played Diplomacy for hours. The board game involves making and betraying allies to conquer pre-First World War Europe and must have been good training for someone who is now Europe’s most

powerful banker. It will also have given him an insight into his adopted country.

In Diplomacy, players can invade any country except one: Switzerland. There are good reasons why it’s tough to conquer Switzerland: it is full of mountains and has the world’s third-highest level of gun ownership. But the game makers didn’t just make

Switzerland hard to attack, they made it immune, uninvadable. It is a witty comment on the role Switzerland has played for centuries: a black hole that is at the heart of Europe while also standing apart from it; not so much nobly neutral, as spectacularly selfish.

Last week, Switzerland promised to collect information on who owns its shell companies and to oblige lawyers to report suspicions of money laundering, as it seeks to shed its reputation as a haven for dodgy cash.

It is the only European country without a national register of ownership – making it a magnet for oligarchs and criminals who seek to disguise their assets. It appears that Switzerland, in its own quiet way, is evolving. Switzerland’s cantons have always acted as safe deposit boxes for foreigners concerned about instability.

But it was in the 20th century that business took off. In the world wars, the country twice found itself an island of peace; in times of peace, it was a tax haven surrounded by governments trying to pay off the debts incurred in the fighting. Wealthy Frenchmen could pay the new income tax when it was created in 1914 or they could bank in Geneva. Wealthy Germans could contribute to the reparations imposed on

their country in 1919 or park their money in Zurich. The more tax rates increased, the more people opted out, particularly after 1934, when it became a crime for Swiss citizens to disclose banking information to foreigners.

By the eve of the Second World War, 2.5 per cent of Europe’s household wealth was stashed in Swiss banks; by the 1970s, it was 5 per cent. Banking became Switzerland’s most

important industry and, just like in Diplomacy, Switzerland was a black hole at the heart of the continent, exploited by anyone who could afford its services: Nazis, communists, kleptocrats, mafiosi, tax evaders, anyone with money to protect. Only three people knew of a bank account’s existence – its owner and two bankers – and it was in their interests to keep it that way. By the 1960s, you didn’t even have to visit Switzerland to use its banks: they had branches all over the world that would happily transmit your funds to head office.

The party was, in retrospect, never going to last. In 2007, a UBS banker called Bradley Birkenfeld told American officials about the tricks he and his colleagues

had used to help his clients dodge US taxes, which included hiding diamonds in toothpaste tubes to smuggle them across borders, and Washington lost patience. It imposed vast fines on the main Swiss banks, and changed its own laws to force any US citizens used their services. Other big countries did the same, meaning the days of Europeans calmly crossing the border to park their funds in the black hole in their midst were over.

And Swiss neutrality had become harder to sustain too. When it was surrounded by countries all fighting each other, Switzerland’s position was justifiable. But now it is surrounded by the EU and standing apart looks perverse. It joined the UN in 2002 and, last year, backed western sanctions against the Kremlin after the invasion of Ukraine. It has since frozen more than

£6 billion worth of Russian assets, thus putting morality ahead of business, something once unimaginable. Switzerland, after all, took more than 50 years to admit its banks had concealed the assets of Holocaust victims from their heirs.

But neutrality for the country or secrecy for its banks were only ever tools to allow it to compete with bigger and wealthier rivals, and perhaps Switzerland doesn’t need that anymore.

UBS has just announced \$29 billion in profits, the largest quarterly profit ever reported by a bank, thanks to its takeover of Credit Suisse, which will lead to an estimated 3,000 job cuts.

Swiss banks, home to \$2.4 trillion of fully declared foreign assets, are ready to play the game on their own behalf now, not just to be a deniable bank vault for others.



Switzerland was a black hole at the heart of Europe, exploited by Nazis, tax evaders and kleptocrats

My school cared only for perfection. No wonder my bullies felt they could carry on

Wheelchair user *Lucy Webster* hoped to make friends at a top private school. Instead she was picked on and mocked because of her disability — and felt teachers did nothing

I can pinpoint the moment when knowing I was different morphed into knowing I was being excluded: the week in year 8 when we were supposed to do a sponsored walk around Richmond Park in south-west London. We'd been asked to split into groups and tell our form teacher so she knew no one was walking alone.

As the week wore on, I remained groupless. Eventually, I plucked up the courage to ask a group that included a few of the girls who could, on some days, be nice to me. I wish I had just left it, because I can still hear the words directed at me, someone who had used a wheelchair since childhood, by another one of the group. “Why would we want to do a walk with someone who literally can’t walk?” she said, half-laughing, half-sneering.

I could feel the words pass through me, a physical weight crushing any breath I could have used to respond. The other girls shifted uncomfortably, but no one spoke. I spluttered something incomprehensible and wheeled away, feeling my conception of myself shift beneath me. A new hatred for who I was took hold. I was 12.

By the time the bell had rung for the next lesson, I was in the hallway, unable to catch my breath through racking sobs. This is how my carer found me, a look of concern spreading across her face. Eventually, she would become used to this: leaving me somewhere for a lesson or lunch time, relatively content, only to return and find me in acute distress.

I was a happy person when I arrived at the school, a posh day school for girls. I am disabled and have always used a wheelchair, and was helped at school by a carer. Yet each nasty comment and humiliation stripped me of this happiness. I developed a nervous twitch as I tried to shrink myself away. I woke each morning with a knot in my stomach, and spent each day coiled with dread.

How do I convey to you what prolonged bullying does to a teenage mind? Perhaps it is best simply to paint some of the scenes etched into my mind. Years of science lessons in which the teacher would add me, an awkward third wheel, to an already formed pair for experiments, because no one wanted to be my partner. The empty desk between me and the rest of the class. Walking along the corridor with a group — a moment of acceptance! — only for them to peel off down a flight of stairs and leave me stranded, waiting for an adult to stop and open the door to the lift.

They were careful, always, to make these slights seem accidental. This was a “respectable” kind of bullying; the kind that makes you wonder if you’re imagining it, if you’ve gone mad. Concerns were raised with teachers, mostly informally, but nothing changed.

I found myself, for the first time, wishing I could be someone else, desperate to be more like the people who were causing such misery. I became a stranger to myself. I came to believe that being disabled meant being alone.

Looking back, it’s the brazenness of the cruelty that stands out. As long as I was doing well academically, I felt the



Lucy Webster’s experiences left her unable to believe she belonged in any group of friends, but she found happiness at university

“I woke with a knot in my stomach, spent days coiled with dread and developed a twitch

school didn’t care, and the girls knew it. I wonder if the fact I went to a competitive school made a difference, if only because there was such a premium placed on perfection, and in their eyes I was obviously and intrinsically imperfect. But more even than the high-achieving nature of the place, I think what really mattered was that it was a girls’ school.

Teenage girls are primed to want to fit in. From books about best friends helping each other ask out cute boys to films about girl gangs who navigate the perils of high school together, every piece of culture marketed at teenage girls drums home the importance of having friends. And not just any old friends, but friends who like what you like, do what you do and, especially in the mid-Noughties era of my youth, look how you look. Is it any surprise that the film I most heard quoted wasn’t the Harry Potter or Twilight series, but *Mean Girls*?

And I didn’t fit in. Not one little bit. Not only did I not look like them, I didn’t have a life that was anything like theirs. I wasn’t able to mooch around the shops

after school. Even if I had been invited to parties, I wouldn’t have had anyone to take me, and I was too ashamed to have my dad drop me off. I made up crushes so I could take part in their giggly chats about boys, but I could feel the distance between my life and theirs.

I was an outsider, my nose pressed against the window of the lives unfolding around me. Teen culture then was much more homogeneous than it is now. There were so few diverse stories told, so few people that looked like me on the television. Imagine if there had been disabled characters on the Disney Channel, going to parties and kissing boys.

For a long time afterwards, I blamed the girls I went to school with for destroying my confidence, twisting my understanding of friendship and convincing me I would be lonely for the rest of my life.

Now, though, at 28, I no longer hold them responsible. They were under enormous pressure to fit in and be perfect, because they were teenage girls at a school that revelled in its impossible standards. My anger has shifted towards the school, to the teachers, who I believe could have intervened but didn’t.

The school, which could have made the case for difference, or at least for basic kindness, but to my mind didn’t. The school, which I think should have ensured I wasn’t put in humiliating situations, but didn’t (a school trip to an adventure playground looms large in my memory). Yes, this is where my anger lies, because it was a huge, powerful, apparently renowned institution, and I was a 12-year-old girl.

I spent the next decade unable to believe that I belonged in any group of friends. I was fixated on the idea that people were nice to me because they had to be, not because they liked me. I was never quite convinced my friends today would be my friends tomorrow. It would take me years to unlearn the conviction that being disabled meant being alone, and, even then, that fear would rear its head again whenever things got tough.

This is what seven years of bullying can do to a person. And yet, despite my fears, I was about to find a place where I did belong — studying at Warwick University — and eventually, I began to believe a better life was possible.

At Warwick, I was very lucky to meet people who accepted difference and didn’t care when I couldn’t do something. Within weeks, I had groups of fabulous pals. We went to lectures and the pub and out dancing, and I could scarcely believe how happy and easy life could be.

The university had laid the groundwork by building a culture of inclusion, where access was flawless and adjustments cheerfully made to make disabled students’ lives easier.

This meant that for the first time in my life, I was not the only disabled person around. I felt a deep sense of belonging. And an idea planted in my mind: with the right people and the right support, disabled life could be what I never imagined — full of fun and friends.

The View From Down Here: Life as a Young Disabled Woman, by Lucy Webster, is published on Thursday (DK, £16.99)

Strewth, Harold! Neighbours is back — this time with an intimacy co-ordinator

Amazon has resuscitated and spiced up the beloved soap, but how will it fare in the streaming age, asks *Sarah Ditum*

The dramatic return from the dead is a well-used plot device in soap operas. But in the case of *Neighbours*, the show itself is pulling a Lazarus, springing back to life like its own tuba-playing Harold Bishop (presumed lost at sea 1991, reappeared with amnesia 1996).

The Australian show was killed off in July last year after 37 years when Channel 5 pulled the plug (although it was made down under, the majority of its funding came from the UK).

The programme went out in a blaze of fan service, with beloved old characters — including Kylie Minogue and Jason Donovan as Charlene and Scott — returning to say goodbye to Ramsay Street.

It all looked pretty final. Until Amazon stepped in, via its Freevee service, and staged a resurrection. Come Monday, September 18, *Neighbours* will be back on screens. Although it might not be quite the cosy teatime soap you remember.

The show has moved with the times and recruited an intimacy co-ordinator for the first time, to oversee what new cast member Xavier Molyneux has called “hot and heavy” scenes between him and fellow freshman Mischa Barton, the Noughties It girl made famous by the teen drama *The OC*.

But this version of *Neighbours* still has its feet planted firmly in the proud traditions of Erinsborough, the fictional suburb of Melbourne where the show is set. Molyneux’s character, Byron Stone, is the son of Jane Harris, aka Plain Jane Superbrain, who has been played by Annie Jones since 1986. She will also be in the revival. Another familiar face making an appearance will be Guy Pearce, who played Mike Young before he cracked Hollywood in *Memento* and *LA Confidential*.

It might be a function of

Guy Pearce and Annie Jones will reprise the roles they first played in 1986



You have reached 100th position in the queue to find someone who cares

Airlines, utilities, supermarkets... Customer service is in meltdown, writes *Tom Calver*

In July, my flight home from Vienna with a low-cost Hungarian airline (I’ll leave you to guess which one) was cancelled just before take-off. After an hour on the tarmac, a sheepish text message was dispatched to 150 phones: “Your rights were emailed to you.”

Air trouble this summer has been par for the course, but few things prepare you for the indifference that follows a flight cancellation in 2023.

As you disembark, there is nobody to answer questions; it’s everyone for themselves. An email drops with a link to a refund form, but the link is broken. A new flight the next day will cost £400 — plus a

night in a hotel — and good luck claiming a refund.

It will surprise no one who has rung a helpline of late, but customer service is in crisis. Just ask the 200,000 UK holidaymakers stranded by last week’s air traffic control chaos. According to the Institute of Customer Service (ICS), satisfaction levels are at an eight-year low. Utility companies and airlines bear the brunt of our wrath — Wizz Air was deemed so inadequate last year that the Civil Aviation Authority had to step in — but even beloved brands such as Waitrose have lost some kudos.

The affliction has hit the public sector too. In 2018 HMRC call handlers regularly kept customers on hold for no more than six minutes. Five years later, average waits are 21 minutes.

What’s gone wrong?

Before the Industrial Revolution, good service was the preserve of the wealthy.

That changed with the rise of consumerism. By the latter half of the 20th century, we began to consider ourselves “consumers entitled to good service”, wrote Kenneth Alan Grossberg, former professor of marketing at Tokyo’s Waseda Business School.

“The concept of service evolved to become a way to increase sales.” The customer was always right. Until now. Resourcing is a big part of the problem. Although the labour market has cooled, there are still more than a million job vacancies. The customer service industry is still recovering from the pandemic exodus of workers and standards have not returned to normal. Most seem to be still “experiencing an unprecedented number of calls”.

The rush to AI

But the main cause of the malaise, suggests Jo Causon, chief executive of the ICS, has been the rapid rush to

embrace technology. “I’m not sure that it’s always quite delivering what we expect it to deliver,” she says.

For tech-evangelists, the potential of AI for customer service is vast. The idea is for chatbots to sit at the bottom of the pyramid, effortlessly handling the vast majority of queries. In cases where things get more complicated, a human steps in.

The reality is rather

DANIEL LEAL/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



different. Lots of early adopters of AI used it as an excuse to cut staffing costs. “Many organisations have become very excited about AI — not as a way to improve the customer experience, but as a way of eliminating human interaction to save money,” says Ian Golding, a customer service consultant. “But AI is not a panacea.”

For proof of the problem, look at April’s ONS business

survey, which asked firms how they were using or planned to use AI. After improving cybersecurity, the most common response was “creating efficiencies to reduce costs or increase productivity”. Providing a “more personalised service to customers” was way behind.

But to be fair to companies struggling with complaints, there are more ways than ever before to register disgruntlement. Pre-internet, the only way to log feedback was to send a letter or ring a helpline. Now, says Calvert, “We’ve got a really internet-savvy population where if they don’t get what they want, they can shout really loudly across social media or leave a review. We’ve become a complaining nation.”

Doing it right

Yet some industries have shown that good service is still possible. A decade ago, the service offered by banks and building societies was

mediocre at best. Now, according to ICS data, they are consistently near the top.

One of the best performers started life 34 years ago as a telephone-only outfit. First Direct, which is owned by HSBC, has never had branches; its customer service is good because it had to be. Unlike most call centre operatives, First Direct’s handlers are not quoted statistics or given goals around average call times; staff are encouraged to talk for as long as the customer wants. It seems to work: this year is set to be First Direct’s biggest yet for current account growth. There is, however, a chicken-and-egg phenomenon: companies with healthy balance sheets can also afford to be nicer.

The expectation game

Customer service is also about expectation management. Ryanair regularly has one of the worst satisfaction scores of any

company — a fact the airline has embraced. Its social media posts routinely mock passengers who complain.

“Ryanair has really set its stall out in terms of brand,” says Calvert. “We’re going to deliver you minimum customer service, and outside of that, you’ve got to pay for it.” Still, the people come: Ryanair has recovered better from the pandemic than any other airline.

Fifty years ago, consumers learnt to expect a basic level of service: indeed, it was necessary to make us part with our money in shops. The internet changed that, as Grossberg points out. “Organisations now try to retrain their customers to expect less service, not more, and in the process are undoing that great accomplishment of the 20th century — the mass market.”

Good service still exists, but much like before the industrial revolution, you now have to pay for it.

Great surf, no megalodons. Maybe that’s why A-listers love Mawgan Porth

Carol Lewis reveals why some of Hollywood’s finest are flocking to a quiet Cornish town

As the mist parts, the ripped torso of Jason Momoa emerges from the waves. A scene from *Aquaman*? No, if the tabloids are to be believed it is happening in Mawgan Porth, a hamlet on the north Cornwall coast dubbed “Hollywood by the Sea”.

The quiet resort where I spend my summer holidays has been plunged into the media limelight – to the bemusement of residents, most of whom roll their eyes and laugh when asked about the influx of A-listers.

Alas, while reporters searched in the Cornish summer mizzle for Momoa, the 6ft 3in Hollywood star was shown on social media

shopping with his 16-year-old daughter in the sunshine of California.

Yet Momoa may know of Mawgan Porth. After all, Jason Statham, his co-star in *Fast X*, the tenth film in the *Fast & Furious* franchise, reportedly bought a house here last summer. The settlement is also home to the Oscar-winning actress Cate Blanchett, who bought two modest properties here in late 2020. Imogen Stubbs is also a long-time owner, having bought her beachfront house in 1995. The hamlet of 300 also counts financiers and entrepreneurs – including the founders of Innocent Smoothies – among its residents.

What brings them here? Mawgan Porth is a quiet, friendly hamlet on a hillside overlooking a Sunday Times award-winning sandy bay with great surfing, close to Newquay airport and a short drive from a range of Michelin-starred restaurants (though some of the area’s

pubs are a little less salubrious).

Celebrities often tend to move in herds and Stanley Tucci, the American actor and film-maker, is a regular in nearby Watergate Bay. The expert Negroni-mixer has been known to pop into Cornish Fresh, Mawgan Porth’s grocery shop. The staff there speak highly of both Tucci and Statham, who is said to have introduced himself last summer.

Locals tell me Statham put notes through the doors of houses he wanted to buy, though I’m sad to report that the letterbox at our 1950s bungalow remained notably empty. I do, though, love the story our gardener tells of the star of *Meg 2: The Trench* – in which he battles a prehistoric shark. Again – paddling up to a young woman in the sea near Newquay to tell her it was dangerous. She replied: “I know, I’m the lifeguard.”

This much we know. But the media rumour



£3 million to a three-bedroom cottage for £695,000.

For the time being, it is possible to walk around Mawgan Porth and have a fish supper in the Catch restaurant or a coffee in the new Muddle and Press café without feeling as if you’re on Rodeo Drive. And I regularly do. My partner and I bought here a few years ago, choosing Mawgan Porth because it is more understated than nearby Polzeath or Rock and without the raucous student parties, which is perhaps what attracts the celebrities too.

Mawgan Porth has long been a holiday location, but rising property prices have led to tensions. The average price here increased 45 per cent during the pandemic but this has since dipped. It now stands at £858,167, with some homes going for as much as £4 million, almost all to second-home owners. The Cornish average is about £350,000.

Mawgan Porth is now too

expensive for many locals to buy or rent in; staff at hotels and businesses either live in work-provided flats or rent in nearby Newquay. It is a scenario playing out across Cornwall: house prices climbed rapidly during the pandemic while affordable house-building stagnated.

Meanwhile some arrivals in Mawgan Porth have upset incumbents by replacing bungalows with large modern homes. A couple of these distinctive black, wood and slate eco-homes – dubbed “James Bond” or “black Lego” homes in recent media coverage – have been criticised for being too big and too close to the cliff edge.

Still, should Momoa or any other celebrity consider joining their fellow A-listers in swapping the Californian sunshine for north Cornwall, I’d still recommend it. Mawgan Porth is hardly Hollywood by the Sea, but the surf is good and the people are friendly. Just remember to keep it low-key.

Get up that tree, kids – it’s time for a game of risk

Obsessive parenting has been the default for decades. But evidence now suggests it did more harm than good, writes Rosie Kinchen



Six years ago, Naomi Fisher decided to try something that felt radical. The community architect and mother of three was tired of forcing her eight-year-old son to stay in the playground with her and his toddler sister, when all he really wanted was to roam around. “I knew I’d done that at his age,” says Fisher. “But I was really struggling with the whole concept. I thought, ‘I can’t just let him go off.’”

She discussed the conundrum with some like-minded parents and together they decided to try. They gave their five children basic rules: “We said, ‘Stay in the park boundaries, stay in a group and look after each other,’” Fisher says. Then they let them get on with it. The children came back an hour and a half later, muddy, wet and grinning. “They thought it was the best thing ever.”

Fisher built a charity based on that experiment. ROAM hosts play sessions in parks around Birmingham five times a week, allowing children to run, climb and jump in streams with minimal supervision. They have fun, but crucially they get a taste of something that is increasingly hard to come by: risk.

Exposing young children to risk may be critical if they are to flourish later in

life. The news agenda is full of stories of adolescent mental health crises, and the NHS has warned of a “national emergency”, suggesting a quarter of 17 to 19-year-olds are likely to be suffering from a mental health condition. There are months-long waiting lists for talking therapies, and schools are trying everything from mindfulness classes to therapy dogs to support anxious teenagers.

There are many theories as to why this is the case, from the onward march of technology to pandemic isolation, but a number of academics and experts argue that the root of the problem may be closer to home.

In a paper to be published in the Journal of Pediatrics this month, Peter Gray, a professor at Boston College in the US, argues the primary cause of the rise in mental disorders is a “decline over decades in opportunities for children and teens to play, roam and engage in other activities independent of direct oversight and control by adults”. In other words, helicopter parenting may be harming children’s mental health. “It’s almost like we are training our young people to be helpless,” says Gray.

My youngest son is starting school this week. On the first day of term tomorrow, he will take his first small steps towards independence. But his journey will be



dramatically different from the one I took 35 years ago.

Studies show that children play outside less than their parents did. They are not, on average, allowed to play unsupervised until they are 11 – two years older than their parents were. Fifty years ago, most children of primary school age walked to school; today that is virtually unheard-of until a child is at least ten.

The school day has grown longer and play times have become more controlled as schools grapple with safeguarding rules. Research from the University of Exeter suggests 5 per cent of schools have banned tag due to the risk of injury.

Perhaps in response to this, my children have developed a fascination with tales from my own childhood. The idea of boarding school, to which I was packed

off aged eight, captivates and horrifies them in equal measure, as does the fact I used to fly to and from the US each term ... on my own. They puzzle over what they would do if they were to find themselves trapped in a lavatory cubicle on a transatlantic flight, as I once was. But they are unlikely to find out. Unplanned, unsupervised free time is being wiped out. With it goes the potential for mishaps and misadventure, the sort of scrapes that have inspired children’s stories from *Just William* to *The Worst Witch*.

Gray believes the impact may be more severe than that. He combed through years of empirical studies to examine the links between children, play and mental health. One study showed that children who put themselves in moderately frightening situations, such as climbing high into a tree, showed lower levels of anxiety and increased confidence in their ability to deal with emergencies. At the other end of the scale, college students who reported that their parents were most actively involved in their day-to-day lives also reported higher levels of anxiety and depression.

Evidence such as this can never be conclusive, Gray says, because you cannot prove that one thing is causing the other, rather than being a response to it. “But when the correlations all go in the same way, you begin to have to pay attention to that,” he says.

Safeguarding is important – no one wants to go back to the kind of 1970s complacency that allowed the likes of Jimmy Savile to flourish – but it seems that attempting to eliminate risk can be counterproductive.

Attitudes towards children began to change in the Sixties, Gray suggests. Before that, children were generally seen as resilient and capable and had newspaper rounds or did babysitting, things that indicated a degree of responsibility and understanding. The real shift happened in the 1980s with the advent of the 24-hour news cycle, which led to long empty stretches of television being filled with coverage of high profile child-kidnappings and murders.

In the UK, cases such as the murder of

Jamie Bulger in 1993 or the abduction of Madeleine McCann in 2007 riveted the nation and raised parental anxiety, despite the fact that such crimes remain incredibly rare.

At the same time we have also bought into the concept of the “good” parent. The author Nora Ephron once observed that when she had children in the late 1970s, the business of having and raising children was fairly straightforward. “You didn’t need a book ... You understood that your child had a personality. His very own personality. He was born with it. For a certain period, this child would live with you and your personality, and you would do your best to survive each other.”

But over the course of a decade, this was replaced by the idea of “parenting”. Ephron wrote: “Parenting was fierce. Parenting was solemn ... it was active, it was energetic, it was unrelenting.”

Parenting today can become an exhausting quest for impossible levels of perfection. A remarkable 2006 report in the US found that working mothers were spending as much time looking after their children as stay-at-home mothers had been in the 1970s – in some cases more.

It is interesting to note the countries that buck the trend. Finland is an outlier in Europe because children there continue to experience an unusually high degree of freedom. Research from 2015 showed that Finnish children were regularly walking and cycling alone at the age of seven and that most were travelling on buses alone at the age of ten. Finland also regularly features in the top five European countries for childhood happiness.

How might we make our own children more robust? In the US, campaigners are championing more adventurous play areas in schools and calling for changes in negligence laws that leave parents who want to give their children more independence open to prosecution. But the real shift has to come from parents.

It can be hard to take the first steps, Fisher says, and one of the biggest fears she had when she began ROAM was of being judged by other parents. “In the early sessions I was scared of someone coming over and having a go at us or calling the police,” she recalls.

The real joy is seeing children figure it out for themselves. Fisher remembers her son’s first session, in November, and the first thing he did was to run off and lie in a stream. “Normally I’d be the parent who would say, ‘Oh, please don’t lie in the stream, you’re going to get cold and we’re going to have to go straight home.’” Instead she bit her tongue. When they came back the following week, he turned to her and said: “This time I’m going to lie in the stream at the end.” It was a victory – and he had worked it out on his own.

THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLERS

Find the full list at www.thetimes.co.uk, all available to buy at timesbookshop.co.uk/bestsellers

GENERAL HARDBACKS				GENERAL PAPERBACKS				FICTION HARDBACKS				FICTION PAPERBACKS			
		Last week	Weeks in top 10			Last week	Weeks in top 10			Last week	Weeks in top 10			Last week	Weeks in top 10
1	42 Douglas Adams and Kevin Jon Davies (Unbound £30) Hundreds of Adams’s personal artefacts, published for the first time (3,455)	—	1	1	Atomic Habits James Clear (Random House £17.99) The minuscule changes that can grow into life-altering outcomes (3,375)	4	105	1	The Sun and the Void Gabriela Romero Lacruz (Daphne £16.99) The story of two young women’s quest for belonging, inspired by Venezuelan folklore (5,780)	—	1	1	Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow Gabrielle Charbonnet (Vintage £9.99) The story of two friends brought together by a shared love of video games (18,395)	1	9
2	The Ship Beneath the Ice/Mensun Bound (Macmillan £25) The story of the expeditions to find Sir Ernest Shackleton’s ship, <i>Endurance</i> (2,385)	—	1	2	Just One Thing/Michael Mosley (Short £9.99) On the benefits to your physical and mental health that small changes can bring (2,825)	1	7	2	Fourth Wing/Rebecca Yarros (Piatkus £20) A young woman is among hundreds of candidates to become an elite dragon rider (5,115)	2	13	2	It Starts With Us/Colleen Hoover (Simon & Schuster £9.99) The sequel to <i>It Ends With Us</i> , revealing Atlas’s side of the story (11,615)	2	8
3	Ultra-Processed People/Chris van Tulleken (Cornerstone Press £22) Investigating the science and economics of highly processed food (2,375)	1	18	3	Undoctored/Adam Kay (Trapeze £9.99) The doctor turned writer and comedian on life on and off the hospital wards (2,740)	2	12	3	Yellowface/Rebecca F Kuang (Borough £16.99) A struggling writer publishes her recently deceased friend’s novel as her own (3,590)	5	14	3	The Lady’s Maid/Dilly Court (Arrow £8.99) In the 1800s, two friends from different social standings discover their pasts are linked (9,940)	7	2
4	Why Has Nobody Told Me This Before? Julie Smith (M Joseph £16.99) Clinical psychologist’s advice for navigating life’s ups and downs (1,735)	5	75	4	Surrounded by Idiots/Thomas Erikson (Vermilion £10.99) How understanding personality types can improve human interaction (2,510)	5	59	4	Happiness/Danielle Steel (Macmillan £22) A bestselling thriller author inherits an English estate from her estranged uncle (2,995)	3	2	4	It Ends With Us/Colleen Hoover (Simon & Schuster £9.99) A first love’s reappearance threatens a woman’s relationship (9,795)	3	99
5	Abroad in Japan/Chris Broad (Bantam £16.99) An Englishman’s experiences living in the Land of the Rising Sun (1,575)	3	4	5	American Prometheus/Kai Bird and Martin J Sherwin (Atlantic £12.99) A biography of the director of the Manhattan Project, J Robert Oppenheimer (1,935)	3	5	5	The List/Yomi Adegoke (4th Estate £14.99) A list of anonymous allegations about abusive men is published online (2,550)	9	6	5	Lessons in Chemistry/Bonnie Garmus (Penguin £9.99) In 1960s America a chemist becomes the star of a TV cooking show (8,640)	4	26
6	The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse Charlie Mackesy (Ebury Press £16.99) An illustrated gentle life philosophy (1,525)	4	188	6	Diddy Squat: ‘Til the Cows Come Home Jeremy Clarkson (Penguin £9.99) The motorhead on another year at Diddy Squat farm (1,680)	8	16	6	The Bone Season/Samantha Shannon (Bloomsbury £20) A reimagined tenth anniversary special edition to the 2013 dystopian novel (2,460)	—	2	6	The Woman Who Lied/Claire Douglas (M Joseph £8.99) A crime writer is alarmed when events in her real life mirror those in her books (7,750)	8	8
7	Echoes/Will Sergeant (Constable £22) The Echo & the Bunnymen guitarist on the band’s rise to stardom (1,255)	—	1	7	I Want to Die but I Want to Eat Tteokbokki Baek Sehee (Bloomsbury £9.99) Dialogues with the author’s psychiatrist over a 12-week period (1,675)	12	2	7	None of This Is True/Lisa Jewell (Century £20) The lives of a popular podcaster and one of her guests become intertwined (2,140)	7	6	7	The Bullet That Missed/Richard Osman (Penguin £9.99) The Thursday Murder Club explore the death of a journalist ten years ago (7,430)	6	16
8	O Brother/John Niven (Canongate £18.99) The novelist on brotherhood and the impact of suicide on family life (1,200)	—	1	8	The Fighter of Auschwitz/Erik Brouwer (Cassell £8.99) The story of the Dutch boxer Leon Sanders, who fought for his fellow prisoners (1,660)	23	1	8	Normal Rules Don’t Apply/Kate Atkinson (Doubleday £18.99) The award-winning novelist’s first short story collection in more than 20 years (2,135)	—	1	8	The Whalebone Theatre/Joanna Quinn (Penguin £9.99) Three spirited children grow to adulthood as the Second World War begins (6,910)	9	3
9	Menopausal/Davina McCall & Naomi Potter (HQ £22) Exploring the science and debunking damaging myths of the menopause (1,120)	6	33	9	Prisoners of Geography/Tim Marshall (Elliott & Thompson £9.99) Ten maps that tell you all you need to know about geopolitics (1,630)	6	156	9	Taste of Blood/Lynda La Plante (Bonnier £22) Detective Jane Tennison investigates a complicated domestic assault case (2,005)	8	2	9	The Satsuma Complex/Bob Mortimer (Simon & Schuster £8.99) A legal assistant scours London looking for a woman he met in a pub (6,635)	10	9
10	Code of Conduct/Chris Bryant (Bloomsbury £14.99) The MP gives his view on issues in parliament and possible solutions (1,060)	2	2	10	The Body Keeps the Score/Bessel van der Kolk (Penguin £12.99) Understanding psychological trauma and an alternative approach to healing (1,610)	16	16	10	Masters of Death/Olivia Blake (Tor £20) A vampire estate agent seeks the help of a medium to sell a haunted mansion (1,900)	4	2	10	The One Plus One/Jojo Moyes (Penguin £9.99) A stressed-out single mum and a luckless stranger meet by chance (6,315)	—	9

The lists are prepared by and the data is supplied by (and copyrighted to) Nielsen BookScan, and are taken from the TCM for the week ending 26/08/23. Figures shown are sales for the seven-day period.



Short-term politicians have let the educational roof cave in

It took one collapsed beam to bring the autumn term crashing into chaos for pupils and staff at more than 150 schools. The incident – thankfully without victims over the summer holiday – led the Department for Education to decide that the presence of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, a flawed material used widely between the 1950s and 1990s, meant the buildings had to be closed indefinitely. Lessons are moving online and temporary classrooms being sought. For children whose education was disrupted by Covid lockdowns, this is yet another unwelcome interruption.

It is also a problem whose roots stretch into the profound challenges Britain faces over spending, tax and growth. What might be called the public estate – from schools and hospitals to bridges – is literally cracking after more than a decade of underinvestment. Repairing it is essential, on both safety and productivity grounds. But doing so will require billions of pounds at a time when there is little wiggle room in the public finances; the tax burden is heading towards a post-war record and growth is weak. Difficult decisions loom for the next government.

Both the outgoing Labour administration and the incoming Conservatives went into the 2010 election in the wake of the financial crisis pledging to cut the structural deficit – although David Cameron and George Osborne vowed to do it harder and faster, while Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling wanted to sustain the nascent economic recovery and protect front-line spending. Michael Gove, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition’s first education secretary, immediately scrapped Labour’s Building Schools for the Future programme, suspending 719 projects. Gove argued it had been “characterised by massive overspends, tragic delays, botched construction projects and needless bureaucracy”. He provoked controversy again four years later when he dipped into the budget that pays for new schools and building expansions to help meet a funding shortfall in his flagship free schools programme.

School spending per pupil in England fell by 9 per cent in real terms between 2010 and 2020. This was the biggest cut in 40 years, although it came on the back of a boom during the 2000s. An injection of cash since Covid, including £2.3 billion in last year’s autumn statement, will only

return per-pupil spending to 2010 levels. Even with the extra money this represents “a significant squeeze” on schools, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has pointed out, and in any case the new cash is likely to be eaten up by inflation. Schools have been struggling with energy and food costs and now face higher teacher salaries. There will be little left over for tearing out concrete or that other horrific modern building legacy: asbestos.

The school estate has a £11.4 billion maintenance backlog, according to a 2021 government report. More than 700,000 pupils are taught in classrooms deemed by the National Audit Office to require major repairs. At £10 billion, the NHS maintenance backlog is almost as big. More than £2 billion of that is considered high-risk. Meanwhile, more than 373 court days were lost in England and Wales last year because of problems with buildings. In this way, cracks in infrastructure spread into the economy as well as quality of life: operations are delayed and cases are not heard.

Politicians tend to think in five-yearly electoral cycles, which are too short for investment in dull infrastructure to bear fruit. They tend to like shiny “grands projects”, such as HS2, or they make hot-air announcements for cheap headlines. The Tories must shoulder heavy blame, having been in power for 13 years. In another context, Cameron and Osborne taunted Brown for failing to fix the roof while the sun was shining. They were referring to the tattered state of the public finances. They repaired the metaphorical roof, but it turned out to be at the expense of the real one, which is now caving in. The tight corset applied to public spending contributed to the dire state of public buildings.

But this crosses party-political divides. Even when New Labour pumped billions into public services, capital spending lagged behind. And Sir Keir Starmer will go into the next election promising to keep spending under control. Labour has no discernible plan for how it would balance the need for investment with the lack of public spending capacity. In 2018, the roof of a primary school in Kent collapsed. It was a Saturday. It is sheer luck that nobody has yet been hurt. The window in which to act is getting perilously narrower. Whoever inherits this mess must come up with a long-term solution. That will probably have to involve spending cuts elsewhere. It will not be easy.

Coups and instability in the Sahel threaten the West too

As the world’s attention has been rightly focused on the war in Ukraine, a troubling series of events has been unfolding in sub-Saharan Africa.

On Wednesday, Gabon’s army seized control from President Bongo, whose family had held power in the oil-rich country since 1967. Barely a month earlier, Niger’s military toppled its democratically elected president. Before that there were two coups each in neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso, another in nearby Guinea, and military takeovers in Sudan and Chad.

The causes have varied, although there are common threads – economic malaise, weak governance and the legacies of colonialism. And while there are many individual implications, the overarching one for Europe is greater instability in a region that cries out for just the opposite.

There is now a chain of military-run countries stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea. Mali and Burkina

Faso threw out French troops deployed there to guard against jihadist insurgencies and hired mercenaries from Russia’s Wagner group. Niger, previously the West’s most important regional ally against Islamic extremism in the region, has also severed security ties with Paris, although French troops remain for now. It is not yet clear how Gabon’s new leaders will behave.

With the waning of French postcolonial influence under President Macron, this is not a situation that can be addressed readily. It is likely to mean higher flows of migrants and the threat of more terrorism. And despite Wagner’s decapitation through the assassination of its leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, we must stay alert to the unholy alliance developing between the Kremlin and unstable parts of the Sahel. China remains a significant presence in Africa, too, and the current chaos can only help those regimes which seek to exploit failing states.

Cuts are welcome at home

Workers hoping to nip out for a lunchtime cut and blow dry may find themselves walking a long way: the latest hair salon is as likely to be in your barber’s back garden as on the high street.

As we report today, high costs and cash-strapped customers are encouraging increasing numbers of hairdressers to work from home. One stylist we spoke to

had converted her dining room into a full salon so she could work more flexibly around her children.

We wonder if this business model might be taken further. Customers peckish after their dye job might be offered a light supper for a small extra fee. Then perhaps a camp bed for the night. We’ve even thought of a name for it: Hairbnb.

Dominic Lawson To Russia, with love from Pope Francis

The pontiff has a weakness for autocracies: the Kremlin appreciates it

A wicked place, social media. Doing the rounds: pictures of Pope Francis and the late Yevgeny Prigozhin, noting their extraordinary physical resemblance, with the odd comment along the lines of “they have never been seen in the same place together”. How disgraceful to insinuate that the Holy Father and the man responsible for the slaughter of thousands of Ukrainians might actually be the same person in different guises. For a start, only one of them, in real life, had worked as a nightclub bouncer (Jorge Bergoglio, before he entered the priesthood).

And for another thing, Francis is far from being a thorn in the side of President Putin, as his doppelganger eventually became (with fatal consequences). Quite the opposite: last week in an encounter with young Russian Catholics in St Petersburg, the Pope, via video, read out prepared words telling them to be “artisans of peace”. Nice. But then he departed from the script, with some passion: “You are the heirs of the great Russia. The great Russia of the saints, of the kings, of the great Russia of Peter the Great, of Catherine II, that great imperial Russia, cultivated with so much culture and humanity. Never forget this inheritance. You are the heirs of the Great Mother Russia, go forward.”

To say this went down badly in Ukraine, not least among the Pope’s fellow Catholics there, would be an understatement. The head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk, many of whose churches have been laid waste by Russian bombs over the past year and a half, said the Pope’s “words about ‘the great Russia of Peter I, Catherine II’ refer to the worst examples of Russian imperialism. We fear that these words will be . . . an encouragement of this nationalism and imperialism, which is the real cause of the war in Ukraine.”

Fair comment. Putin has frequently cited those two imperial Russian rulers in defence of his own view of Ukraine (that it has no true independent identity). Catherine was the empress who, by force, brought most of what we now know as Ukraine under Russian rule, and turned vast numbers of Ukrainian peasants into the personal slaves of favoured Russian nobles. She also tried to extirpate the Ukrainian language. Peter, too, issued a decree forbidding the printing of any book in Ukrainian. A massacre during Peter’s reign was reported in the Gazette de France at the time:

“All the inhabitants of Baturyn, regardless of age or sex, are slaughtered, according to the inhuman customs of the Muscovites . . . The whole of Ukraine is bathed in blood.”

Admittedly, Peter’s barbarism did not spare his own family: he personally oversaw the torture of his son, before having him executed. I don’t suppose this is the sort of thing the Pope meant when he extemporaneously praised these rulers’ “great imperial Russia, cultivated with so much . . . humanity”.

Whatever he did mean by it, the present occupants of the Kremlin were delighted. Putin’s spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said this was “gratifying . . . the pontiff knows Russian history and this is very good”. Peskov added that Francis was “in unison” with the Russian government’s efforts to teach history according to Putin’s interpretation.

This episode seems even odder, given that the Vatican has offered to act as some sort of peacemaker in Ukraine. That was always far-fetched; but what chance now of any Ukrainian regarding the diplomats of the Holy See as honest brokers? Yet it is part of a strange pattern. The only person mourned specifically as an innocent casualty of the conflict by the Pope is Daria Dugina, whom he referred to as “that poor girl thrown into the air by a bomb under the seat of a car in Moscow”.

She was the daughter of the man probably intended as the target by Kyiv (though it denies it), the ultra-nationalist Russian academic Alexander Dugin: he had declared that “Ukrainians need to be killed, killed, killed. I am telling you this as a professor.” Dugina, an enthusiastic proponent of her father’s world-view, had in an interview promoted the idea that Russians should be permitted to assault captured Ukrainian soldiers. When it was suggested the captives might not survive such treatment, Dugina responded: “There is nothing terrible about that.” Her own end was indeed terrible; but it is still peculiar that she

Francis spoke last week of ‘great imperial Russia’

Ben Judah To succeed in the electric era, dig yourself a mine

The race for critical minerals will decide the course of the 21st century

Nobody is looking forward to the G20. Not Joe Biden, who was expecting to meet Xi Jinping for only the second time since Biden’s election – only to be told the Chinese leader isn’t attending. Nor the host, Narendra Modi, who has failed to get the arriving ministerial teams to work on the most important issue driving apart China, America, Europe and the rest. Hint: it’s bigger than Ukraine.

At the top of most leaders’ minds during the Delhi summit will be the race for critical minerals, a momentous shift that is reshaping global politics.

The world is moving from a fossil fuel-based economy to a metals-based economy. Forget the jargon. This is what the green transition means in practice: a global mining and refining revolution for batteries and other technology needing vast quantities of lithium, cobalt, rare earth materials and more. Everybody needs the same things to fuel an industrial revolution in energy, heating and transport. In other words: the core of modernity itself.

This green lucre is what attracted James Cleverly to China last week. Cleverly became the first foreign secretary to visit Beijing in five years, despite tensions over Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Uighurs and Chinese spying in Britain. Why did he go? Among other things, Cleverly explained, he is hunting for investment in electric vehicle battery production and green energy.

Because in this century-defining industrial race for metals and clean energy, the West is badly behind. China is adding as many renewables – forests of solar panels and wind turbines – to the grid as the rest of the world combined. It refines most of the world’s critical minerals – including two thirds of its lithium and 80 per cent of its cobalt. China’s economy may be faltering, but in mining it has a serious head start. Domestically it mines more than 70 per cent of the world’s rare earth materials; internationally its mining web has a decade-plus head start through its loans-for-resource-

control Belt and Road initiative across Africa, Asia and Latin America.

That would be bad enough, but China has cornered green manufacturing: it has 80 per cent of the market for lithium-ion batteries and 60 per cent of the core components of wind turbines. Its electric vehicles are winning the battle for market share: Germany, dithering about letting go of the combustion engine, has seen its car exports to China slide as Chinese manufactures export large numbers of electric vehicles to Europe. The wealthy may still buy Teslas, but car dealers expect that in a few years China’s affordable brands will make up a third of UK sales.

All these changes require a whole host of minerals – especially lithium. And prospectors are everywhere. So far attention has focused on poorer countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, with some 70 per cent of the world’s cobalt, and Indonesia, which mines just shy of half the world’s nickel. However, as Britain’s Victorian explorers knew well, a mining revolution is nothing without a revolution in prospecting too. Game-changing discoveries of rare earths have been found in Finland and Sweden. Even Cornwall, home of Poldark and Geevor tin, is getting back into the mining game, securing £53.6 million of investment for its first lithium mine.

This new mineral age is reshaping geopolitics – with the position of Europe particularly vulnerable. There was much discussion earlier this year of Europe and

Even Cornwall is getting into the lithium game



should have been singled out by the Pope as an example of an “innocent”, rather than any one of the hundreds of children murdered by Putin’s bombing of the Ukrainian civilian population.

But Francis does seem to have a tendresse for autocracies (which anti-Catholics would doubtless see as unsurprising, given the way popes are accorded unquestioned authority). In 2018 he agreed to give the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) the right to nominate Catholic bishops, a policy never agreed by any of his predecessors, and described to me by a distraught Catholic priest as “an act of perfidy, stupidity and betrayal”.

In 2021, when the Vatican held an extraordinary gathering of the world’s faith leaders in the run-up to the UN’s climate change conference in Glasgow, calling on governments to “take speedy, responsible and shared action” to reduce CO₂ emissions, the only faith leader who seemed not to have been invited was the head monk of Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai Lama. Previous popes had invited the Dalai Lama to the Vatican – John Paul II on several occasions. But Francis will do nothing that might offend the CCP, which was, bizarrely, praised in 2018 by the chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, the Pope’s fellow Argentinian bishop Marcelo Sorondo, as “assuming a moral leadership which others have abandoned”.

This referred to climate change policy (notwithstanding China building more new coal-fired power stations than any other nation). And it gives a clue to why the Pope’s genuflections to Beijing and Moscow are given less critical scrutiny than one might expect. Francis’s decision to put the Catholic Church in the forefront of “saving the environment” has made him a hero in the secular media, which would normally have little time for any Vatican autocrat. Thus, Time magazine, marking a decade of Francis’s rule in March, ran a hagiographic piece entitled “How ten years of Pope Francis has changed climate action”.

And last week The Guardian, which did not report the Pope’s endorsement of Russian imperial “humanity”, ran a feature headlined: “Pope Francis to lay bare ‘terrible world war’ on nature”. He had indeed just referred to CO₂ emissions as “a terrible world war”, and to “the victims of climatic injustice”, promising a further papal letter on this next month.

Does that make him one of the good guys? I don’t think so.

dominic.lawson@sunday-times.co.uk



America creating a critical minerals club: really a western buyers’ cartel to drive down rising mineral prices and lock out China. US officials I’ve spoken to have cooled on this idea, though, because the prospecting revolution has only just begun and they don’t want to commit themselves before they see where it is heading. At present we just don’t know what the world is going to need and where.

Working on a think tank report for the Atlantic Council on the new green geopolitics over the past year, I’ve seen expectations move wildly. A year ago Washington experts felt that most of the West’s mining would have to take place in the so-called global south, but now it looks more and more as if Australia and Canada will play the key roles. It turns out those vast empty tracts mapped by those Victorian explorers aren’t so worthless after all.

America seems to have realised this. And Australia – which mines more than 40 per cent of the world’s lithium – has been the focus of its attention. Australian mining activities will be considered domestic suppliers for the US. The plan is to reroute that lithium – which is at present heading to China. But this is not enough to stave off the big problem for this new metals world order: massive looming shortage. Lithium shortages could hit as soon as 2025. We need dozens of new mines, fast.

As for Britain, Rishi Sunak will arrive at the G20 a puzzling figure: the prime minister of a nation without an industrial policy in a global industrial policy race, with no diplomatic focus on minerals when the rest of those assembled are competing ferociously over this.

There is no such lack of focus in those behind the Anglo-French lithium venture set to start digging in Cornwall. Because amid this mad scramble for precious new resources, one thing is clear: if you want to be rich – and secure – in the 21st century, much like in the 19th, the best thing to do is get a mine.

Ben Judah is the author of *This Is Europe: The Way We Live Now* (Picador)
Hadley Freeman is away

COMMENT



Kathleen Stock

Telling women how to cut the risk of rape is anything but sexist



It is not victim-blaming to suggest ways of reducing vulnerability to attack. It is our duty

If you're a bloke, you are probably well aware that drinking in male company increases your chances of getting in a fight. There's an established link – not inevitable but still observable – between alcohol and aggressive behaviour, and a further one between testosterone and aggression. Putting the two together can spell trouble, as anyone who hangs around pubs will recognise.

Equally, and for roughly similar reasons: if you're a woman, drinking in the company of men increases your chances of being sexually assaulted. Some of us know this from bitter experience. Strangely though, feminism – of all things – has made it impossible to make this second point without an avalanche of criticism.

Last week gave us confirmation when a furore developed around comments by Andrea Giambruno – better known as the partner of Giorgia Meloni, the Italian prime minister. While hosting a television debate about rape, he said: “If you go dancing, you have every right to get drunk – there shouldn't be any kind of misunderstanding and any kind of problem – but if you avoid getting drunk and losing your senses, you might also avoid running into certain problems, because then you find the wolf.”

Whenever you hear a comment like that in public, you know that certain formulaic responses are on their way. Staying on script, a female MP complained that the remarks constituted “victim shaming”. She also noted that Giambruno “forgets to tell men – who are the only guilty parties – to avoid raping”. The presenter's comments were widely reported as if they were just a sly way of saying that rape victims who drink alcohol in mixed company were asking for it. His subsequent clarification

that, “I never said men are free to rape women who are drunk” – also describing rape as an “abominable act carried out by beasts” – doesn't seem to have helped his cause much.

Such an uncharitable reading was always likely. Meloni, the mother of Giambruno's child, forged her path to power on a socially conservative platform apparently nostalgic for the Italy of the 1950s. Abortions, gay parents and immigrants are out; God, heterosexuals and patriotism are back in. And the highly emotive setting of the discussion – it was about gang rapes of teenage girls – was hardly germane for nuanced interpretation. One might even say that if you're going to make ambiguous remarks like that in such a context, you deserve all the public backlash you get.

Still, Giambruno is perhaps not such a hardliner as he might appear. In the past, the prime minister has described her partner as “on the left”, claiming that they disagree on “gays, on ethical issues, on the legalisation of soft drugs”. And either way, it seems to me there's a reading of his message that's not only defensible but important. Someone needs to tell young women what sort of world they live in and how best to defend themselves accordingly – imperfectly certainly, but still better than nothing. Contrary to popular belief, this isn't always the same thing as telling women that if they don't listen to sensible advice, they have no right to complain about whatever happens next.

There are two possible interpretations of statements of the form “if you do X, Y is likely” – each quite different. The first involves the forecasting of probabilities and implies nothing about whether or not you “deserved” or would otherwise be

“No matter how scantily dressed a victim is, it is not her fault

morally responsible for Y, if you did X. “If you exercise, you're more likely to live to a ripe old age”; “If you go out in the rain without an umbrella, you'll get wet”. The name of the game here is prediction not evaluation – of simply drawing attention to the increased chances of this, if you do that. What you choose to do with the information afterwards is up to you.

Often, though, “If you do X, you're likely to get Y” contains a not-so-hidden moral judgment instead. This says, “Don't come crying to me if you don't like the outcome – you really brought this on yourself!” This pursed-lip stance makes sense only if you think that the person you're addressing already knows about the existence of the causal pattern in question. You wouldn't tell someone who had never heard of electricity but who put their wet hand in a socket that she was at fault for getting electrocuted.

But even where someone knows that doing X makes Y more likely, it doesn't follow that, if she chooses to do X, she becomes morally responsible for Y. This is particularly the case when the outcome is an action that someone else chooses. In that case, that person is still the only one responsible. For instance, at various times in history conscientious objectors have known that their pacifist stance will lead to their own executions. Such foreknowledge does not mean that when the time came they were morally responsible for their own deaths.

There seems to be no doubt that many people blame some rape victims for what happens to them, irrationally. In one 2010 survey, more than half of respondents thought that “drinking to excess” or “dressing provocatively” made rape victims more responsible for the outcome. Yet it is rapists who are responsible for their crimes. No matter

how intoxicated nor scantily dressed a victim, it is not her fault. Sexual assault is devastating for a person, both physically and psychologically, and adding undeserved blame and shaming to the mixture is extra cruel.

Still, given that rape, precisely, is so devastating, I think we have a duty to tell women about which circumstances might make their victimisation more likely, and which might make it less. To repeat – this is not victim-blaming, nor making women responsible for violations that men choose to commit. It is more in the spirit of “forewarned is forearmed”. This is how dangerous men behave, and these are the environments in which they become more dangerous. This is how you can try to reduce your risk, even if you can never eliminate it. No panacea is being offered. Nothing guarantees your safety. Still, a reduced risk is better than nothing.

Telling men “to avoid raping” – as the MP critic of Giambruno urged him to do – is all well and good, though in practice is unlikely to deter offenders much. But in any case, there's no reason why we can't talk about effective deterrents – and we should – and also talk about how women can best protect themselves from the most serious harm. I tell my teenage sons to watch their backs in drunken crowds. They shouldn't have to live in a world where other males maraud drunkenly around looking to pick fights, but the sad fact is, they do. Telling them about it doesn't mean they shouldn't go out socialising, nor does it mean that they deserve whatever happens to them there. When the time comes, I'll certainly be telling my daughter how she can try to protect herself from dangerous men. In fact, I'll consider myself at fault if I don't.

Matthew Syed is away

Jonathan Sumption

Bercow did a service to democracy by standing up to May

Fighting old battles is the traditional occupation of fallen politicians. Theresa May's new book, *The Abuse of Power*, is a classic of the kind. Top of her target list is John Bercow, the former Speaker of the House of Commons. She accuses him of abusing his power in order to frustrate her deal with the EU. He did this, she says, by “overriding the longstanding convention that the government determined the business of the house”. This is a striking claim, raising questions of real constitutional importance. Is there anything in it?

Between 2017 and 2019 May and Boris Johnson faced a situation unprecedented in British politics. The House of Commons had confidence in the Tory government, thanks to May's deal with the Ulster Unionists. But it had no confidence in the government's main (indeed only) policy. This meant that the government could not be ousted in a confidence vote, and yet it could not get its business through the Commons. Its plans were frustrated by opposition from an organised group of hard-Brexiteers on one side and former Remainers trying to salvage something from the wreckage on the other.

In this situation May tried to get her way by exploiting the government's control over the parliamentary agenda. Standing order No 14 provides that with limited exceptions “government business shall have precedence at every sitting”. May tried to use this to ensure that her own deal was the only one on the table. Nothing else could be put on the order paper, which sets out the parliamentary business of the day.

The idea was that MPs would have to support her deal in the end whether they liked it or not, because the alternative would be no deal at all, and nearly every one agreed that that would be the worst possible outcome. She would have kept on putting the deal to a vote until they succumbed. Johnson used the same tactics, except that he went further by proroguing parliament, something May had refused to do. The real abuse of power was the misuse of parliamentary procedure to close off the

“It was not the Speaker's job to help the PM dictate terms to the Commons

options open to MPs and force through measures that had insufficient parliamentary support.

Bercow is a divisive figure. As Speaker, he was loud, rude and far too full of himself. But he was the servant of the House of Commons, not of the government. It was not his job to help the prime minister dictate terms to the house. He perceived that there was a real problem and tried to find a solution.

In a string of rulings he gave a voice to other sections of parliamentary opinion. They deserved to be heard, because they might just have commanded more support than the government's plans. In the end it came to nothing because the parliamentary Labour Party was more interested in embarrassing the government than in playing a constructive role. But that was not Bercow's fault. His rulings certainly played fast and loose with traditional procedures, but those procedures had failed in the face of a constitutional logjam. For all Bercow's faults, he did a service to our democracy that has never been properly acknowledged.

For the moment the problem has gone away, as the present government has a working majority. But sooner or later there will be more hung parliaments. Nearly every other legislature in the democratic world has procedures by which it can determine its own agenda. In a parliamentary system the government is answerable to the elected representatives of the people. There is no reason it should be entitled to control their agenda when it does not command their support.

May is an honourable politician. But her spat with Bercow is an undignified piece of buck-passing, which shows that she has learnt little from her time in power. Her EU deal was a more intelligent solution than Johnson's or even Rishi Sunak's. But her attempts to force it through were disreputable, a constitutional anomaly that Bercow did well to expose. He fought his battles in a good constitutional cause. It is a pity that he was such a bad advertisement for it.

Lord Sumption is a former lord chief justice

GRIZELDA'S WEEK



COMMENT

Robert Colvile

In the age of the individual, Sunak should learn from all-conquering Taylor Swift



What links Taylor Swift, Cristiano Ronaldo and Nadine Dorries? Global fame? Devastating sexual charisma? In two out of three cases, sure. (Sorry, Cristiano.) But the real answer is that they are symptoms of perhaps the most important underlying trend in our politics: the great shift from institutions to individuals.

In the old days, it was institutions that had the power. Record companies. Football clubs. Political parties. But that power has been getting weaker and weaker. When her record label sold the masters of Swift’s albums to one of her enemies, she re-recorded them with the parenthesis “(Taylor’s Version)”. When the Saudi government decided to turn its football league into a juggernaut, it gambled that the social media sway of Ronaldo, Neymar and its other recruits would have people cheering for teams they’d never even heard of. As for Dorries, she finally quit parliament with a breathtakingly solipsistic 1,800-word Mail on Sunday column – after months in which her media appearances were many times more frequent than her visits to parliament or her constituency. Resignation letter, Nadine’s version.

This focus on individuals isn’t

completely new, of course. Victorian voters went dizzy for Dizzy and gaga for Gladstone. But what’s different is the extent to which loyalty has been displaced by fandom. Think of the Corbynite capture of the Labour Party. Or the Johnson ascendancy on the Tory side. Or the way Trump crushed institutional Republicanism underfoot, to the point where the only new policy in its 2020 manifesto was to “enthusiastically support the president’s America-first agenda”. Or the way that a footballer – Marcus Rashford – forced a government with an 80-seat majority into a U-turn on free school meals.

Of course, there are still institutions that matter. But these days, they tend to be expressions of fandom themselves. It’s hard to imagine the RSPB denouncing ministers as “liars” and pronouncing sententiously about “a nature and climate emergency” in the days of Jonathan Dimbleby, Magnus Magnusson or Colonel Sir Tufton Beamish. In an individualistic age, people become members of the RSPB, or the Church of England, out of motivation rather than obligation. The same is true of political parties. Conservative and Labour clubs used to be at the heart of the community – not least for lack of other options. Today, if you care enough to give a political party

your card details, you probably really, really care.

This trend has all kinds of implications for our politics, not many of them positive. It makes parties harder to manage, because MPs don’t feel as strong a need to fall in line. All other things being equal, it moves parties away from the centre: it’s striking that Labour’s membership has been falling even as its poll ratings have been rising, because compromise upsets the fans. It makes things tough for politicians such as Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer, both institutional men. And it may, as we’ve seen in other countries, make it easier for insurgent parties if they can find the right figurehead. I suspect that a party led by money-saver Martin Lewis would have a decent chance of following in the footsteps of Emmanuel Macron and his En Marche party – though surely no Briton would be as gauche as to name their party after their own initials.

But that’s not all. Parties with smaller memberships will tend to be more influenced by passionate groups on their fringes. They will also struggle to do controversial or transformative things unless they can win over other fandoms, or find charismatic individuals to act as their champions. If Margaret Thatcher was attempting her programme of national revival today, she would be

doing so with an army of supporters roughly seven times smaller. Likewise, one of the many reasons Theresa May ran into trouble in 2017 was that her manifesto agitated all manner of motivated interest groups: teachers (school funding), animal rights activists (fox hunting) and elderly people who

wanted to keep their own homes. There’s a broader problem, too. One of the defining tendencies of online communities is to self-radicalise. Whether it’s the far right or far left, or fans of Ariana Grande or My Little Pony, the more you become involved with a group, the more it defines your identity – not least because the way you gain status in a group is to be the most committed member. But this means that you lose a common frame of reference. The art of politics is about trade-offs. But fandoms tend to deal in absolutes.

To see what I mean, just look at the recent row about nutrient neutrality, which revolved around the trade-off between housebuilding and phosphate emissions. The government wasn’t actually weakening pollution targets – it was promising to put hundreds of millions more into cleaning up rivers. But no one cared about the policy detail. This was a clash of fandoms between housing zealots like me, and nature nuts like the RSPB. And we were starting from completely different places.

Indeed, this is something particularly worrying about the age of fandom: that there are many more fans of blocking changes than making them.

In 2011, the coalition put forward some modest planning reforms. The Daily Telegraph promptly launched a

campaign called “Hands off our land”, recruiting a gallimaufrey of fandoms from the Campaign to Protect Rural England to Friends of the Earth to the Football Association to, yes, the RSPB. And of course the movement attracted celebrity support: Jo Brand, Bill Bryson, Tony Robinson, Michael Morpurgo and more. The government duly caved in.

Today, one of the most striking and encouraging phenomena in Westminster has been the growth of the Yimby’s – young policy enthusiasts who have pinpointed our failure to build and grow as our key economic weakness. Groups such as Britain Remade, PricedOut or the team behind Works in Progress magazine are winning argument after argument, on both left and right.

But as a mass movement, they are monumentally outnumbered. And while there are plenty of celebrities keen to defend the view from their garden, it’s hard to think of a Feargal Sharkey or Martin Lewis equivalent who can whip the nation into a frenzy over house prices, grid connections or unbuilt dual carriageways.

It’s a tall order, but those of us who want Britain to thrive need to not only win the policy argument for growth, but somehow make it cool again. Does anyone have Taylor’s number?

@RColvile

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A brush with the Chinese spy state

I share the concern of Professor Steve Tsang (“Xi’s student spy army – and how they can be outsmarted”, News Review, last week).

I taught a master’s module on communications at a UK university. One of the case studies I discussed to illustrate the use of public relations was Malaysia Airlines MH370 flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, which disappeared from radar screens without trace in 2014. Two Chinese students stood up in the lecture and shouted that the flight had been downed to kill Chinese passengers.

I told them this was preposterous and disrespectful, but they insisted it was true. I asked about their source. They told me it was the Xinhua news agency. I told them that as Xinhua was the official state news agency, the information could be questionable. A day later I received an email from one of the students to say that as a lecturer I had “a duty to disseminate the correct facts”.

A few months later my wife and I visited China on holiday. We left via Shanghai.

The immigration desk had a picture of us in Tiananmen Square. We had evidently been watched.

*Robert Minton-Taylor
Visiting fellow
Leeds Beckett University*

Raking in the fees

Students will naturally take home everything they learn, and the contact details of people they meet here, when they finish their courses. This is not espionage – it’s what they paid for and is encouraged by our government, which wants universities to recruit foreign students because they pay more.

Dr Richard Turner, Beverley

Dirty secrets

We are a country that spends little on research, that can’t build a railway, that wanted the Chinese to build our nuclear power stations and our 5G infrastructure, that can’t launch a satellite, that has left the EU and that has had a new aircraft carrier in the garage for many months. What are the Chinese so desperate to know?

*Frank Smith
Ruthin, Denbighshire*

Pay Ulez now, or we all pay later

The backlash against Sadiq Khan’s Ulez zone highlights a far-reaching problem. Any environmental proposal deemed inconvenient to modern life will get a similar reaction, yet as the climate crisis becomes more obvious, there is little doubt that those in power are going to have to introduce far harsher changes than Ulez.

Are we just going to vote against such unpopular proposals, like an inverted version of turkeys voting for Christmas?

Colin MacDonald, Stourbridge

Big Brother at the wheel

I have received two letters from the mayor of London’s office advising me that my 17-year-old BMW and my

21-year-old Peugeot may not be compliant with the Euro 6 emission standard required.

Assuming every owner of a non-compliant vehicle who has ever driven into Greater London has had a similar letter, the cost must be staggering – but even more anxiety-inducing is the Big Brotherliness of it. I am developing Ulezophobia.

Peter Sergeant, Loughborough

Slowing down pollution

Having moved from the country to a busy town, I am shocked by the build-up of fumes at roundabouts and junctions at busy times.

Anticipating traffic movement, rather than reacting and braking, and accepting realistic speed limits to aid traffic flow, is something we can all do as we follow the road to transition.

Richard Ashwell, Poole

ANDY JONES



Emily Bridges has accused British Cycling of “genocide”

Sport is meant to be exclusive

Bravo, Kathleen Stock (Comment, last week). Those three words diversity, inclusion and equality are causing some pretty big problems.

Women’s sport was created for women – to give women a chance to win their own competitions; to get their own funding and prizes in an unequal biological

world. It was never meant to be inclusive.

*Louise Drury
Poulton Le Fylde, Lancashire*

Unfair competition

If trans women, as they claim, have no physiological advantage over biological women, we would presumably see more trans men competing in men’s sports. But we don’t.

Funny, that.

*Nicholine Hayward
Richmond, London*

Rowntree was a Yorkie hero

Katie Gatens thanks God that there are no statues of Joseph Rowntree in sight on her visit to York (“A tour of picturesque York that you’re not meant to enjoy”, News Review, last week). It might be worth pointing out that the Rowntree family built a village for workers just outside York more than a hundred years ago and paid a minimum wage.

Pioneering sociological research in the city by his son B Seebohm Rowntree, published in 1901, definitively proved that people were poor principally because they were paid too little, not because they spent their money unwisely. Without the work of Rowntree, it is quite likely a welfare state would not have emerged in the UK after the Second World War.

I am merely trying to add a little balance to the “meaningful discussion” that the tour guide speaks of in your article.

Geoff Green, York

Two tales

If you go to York and take an open-top bus tour, it will pass Clifford’s Tower. The horrendous treatment of those Jews who died there is not skirted over at all. You’ll also get told some pleasant things about York.

Anne Johnston, Edinburgh

Solve today’s problems

I’m imagining a history tour of future Britain by this guide.

“Now let’s drive along this motorway, where people were killed because the government of the day removed the hard shoulder. And here’s a hospital where the ambulances used to pile up in a queue for hours and then the patients lay in corridors for days on end. Oh yes, and there was another hospital where babies died while the managers were paid enormous salaries. That brown river over there used to be a trout stream but now nothing lives in it...”

Instead of self-flagellation over the past, we should be fixing the present.

*Elizabeth Hutchinson
Nansledan, Cornwall*

Cosmetic change

What exactly does Bridges think makes him a woman? The lippy he wears, the long hair, the skirts? Strangely, I don’t need any of that to be a woman.

Helen King, Grouville, Jersey

Male entitlement

Spot the difference. An entitled man assumes a right to force a kiss on a woman, and when the world is rightly appalled, he blames her and threatens legal action.

Another man assumes a right to compete in events reserved for women, accusing anyone who even questions this of “furthering a genocide”.

David Hornsby, Herne Bay

Foul play

That photo is an exemplary lesson in patriarchal power play. Spanish female footballers achieved an impressive win. Instead of letting them bask in the moment, Luis Rubiales uses his physical strength and position of power to remind a player of how vulnerable she is. Truly grotesque.

D Evans, Liverpool

The RAF’s wings need clipping

Robert Colvile asks whether the MoD needs eight acres of land per soldier (Comment, last week) and suggests a reappraisal of what the state does and why. Amen to that. An unsentimental reorganisation of HM armed forces has the support of many serving and retired.

All three forces have air arms, and the RAF operates fewer than 75 per cent of

The Sunday Times,
1 London Bridge Street,
London SE1 9GF
Email: letters@sunday-times.co.uk

BIRTHDAYS

Sarah Bradford, historian, 85
Fearne Cotton, TV and radio presenter, 42
Steve Jones, Sex Pistol, 68
David Malan, cricketer, 36
Josie Rourke, film and theatre director, 47
Charlie Sheen, actor, 58
Gareth Southgate, football manager, 53



Fearne Cotton is 42 today

ANNIVERSARIES

1917 First “moonlight raid” by German aircraft kills 130 sailors at Chatham drill hall
1998 Swissair crash: 229 die
2004 Beslan school siege in Russia ends with deaths of 350 people, more than half of them children

aircraft. Almost all RAF operations support land forces; a few are maritime-related. Yet the RAF maintains a superstructure comparable to the other services. Were most of its personnel transferred to the army and navy, many fewer would be required, an annual saving of at least £5 billion.

Recent RAF organisational failures have been embarrassing. Now is the time for change.

Lieutenant Commander Lester May (retired), London NW1

A monstrous disappointment

I remember reading in Chicago in the 1970s about a plan to stock Lake Michigan with three breeding pairs of Loch Ness monsters (News, last week). They must be very disappointed.

*Barbara Hodges
Kenilworth, Warwickshire*

Deep fears

Quite a few years ago, when I lived not far away, some

mates and I decided to go scuba diving in the loch. We agreed on a maximum depth of 20m.

I am not a monster-believer, but, descending the steep slope of the loch, in clear, peaty water, I bottled out at 14m. The darkness, even at that depth, was enough to have you constantly looking over your shoulder.

I still don’t believe in the monster, but ...

*Paul Hutchinson
Ballynahinch, Co Down*

POINTS

Tangled web

I found Rod Liddle’s description of “the internet” fascinating (Comment, last week), but unfortunately I do not have a computer or smartphone. Are there any plans to publish a printed edition?

*Ralph King (sent by a friend)
Morpeth, Northumberland*

Twin joys

Stephen Bleach gives many good reasons why we should count our blessings and be cheerful (News Review, last week). Here’s another. My son and his male partner recently fostered to adopt twin babies. Sixty years ago they would have faced jail or chemical castration for cohabiting, like Alan Turing. We have moved on.

David Simmonds, Woking

Back to earth

Martha Lane Fox’s account of Lastminute.com having to send flowers to the wife of a customer after he took a trip with another woman (Business, last week) calls to mind a campaign by United Airlines to increase sales by encouraging customers to take their wives on business trips. This proved successful until a United Airlines executive decided to send flowers to all the wives with a note saying, “We hope you enjoyed the trip” – provoking quite a few angry replies of, “What trip?”

Trevor Lyttleton, London NW11

Poor display

“British Museum plundered ‘for decades’”, read your Picture Bubble headline (Comment, last week). Yes, it did.

Charles Harris, London, NW3

Al-desko love

Your editorial last week said, “Enticing workers back to the office can only help business.” What about the restoration of the office romance? Lovesick employees may even ask: do you come here often?

Leslie Davies, Ponthir, Gwent

Child’s play

I was glad to read Hadley Freeman’s article “The easiest way to fail a child? Never let them fail” (Comment, last week). When my two brothers and I were growing up, our parents were strict about only a few vital things. On weeknights we had to be back at 10pm, and they

had to know whom we were with and where we were going. That was it. Nothing else. As a result, we respected our parents’ few boundaries. We thrived.

*Helen Bennett
Royston, Hertfordshire*

Landlords losing

The Paragon Bank boss, Nigel Terrington, was glib in his interview with Jill Treanor about buy-to-let (Business, last week). I let properties in the southeast, and rents are yielding 3-4 per cent of capital value, not 7 per cent. I would say a rental property bought now would, after all costs and taxes, be generating negative cashflow for several years.

Colin Oldfield, London SE9

Letters should arrive by midday on Thursday and include the full address and a phone number. We may edit letters, which must be exclusive to The Sunday Times

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS



We wrongly said in “A tour of picturesque York that you’re not meant to enjoy” (News Review, last week) that repairs to York Minster were being funded by the Church of England’s investment in the South Sea Company, which traded slaves. In fact the repairs are entirely funded by the minster’s own income from ticket and retail sales, property lets, grants, donations and legacies. We are happy to make this clear.

The Ulez charge affects most diesel cars registered before 2015 and most petrol cars registered before 2006, not pre-2015 petrol and pre-2006 diesel as we wrongly said.

Complaints concerning inaccuracies should be sent to complaints@sunday-times.co.uk or Complaints, The Sunday Times, 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF. In addition, the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) will examine formal complaints about the editorial content of UK newspapers and magazines. Please go to our website for full details of how to lodge a complaint.

READERS’ POLL

Last week we asked: **Are you in favour of low-emission zones?**



This week’s question: **Are firms right to force staff into the office with threats of bonus cuts?**

Have your say at sundaytimes.co.uk/poll

JOIN THE CONVERSATION ONLINE

Our readers’ tales of adoption would have moved the flintiest heart; likewise the comments below, such as that of N Fox: “My dad, 95, was abandoned as a child and never knew anything about his parents. He was brought up in care. In 2019, via DNA testing, we found his sister, still alive, and four nephews.

Dad and his sister had lived in neighbouring towns for 40 years. We have formed a unique bond with our new family. We have many years to catch up on.” **John Harley** “found my mother when she was 69 and I was 49. She had been a debutante and was sent to a ‘naughty girls’ house’ to have me. On her

90th birthday last year we had four generations of the family round the lunch table.” **AM Duffy**’s birth mother “is visiting me and my wife right now. I was adopted by an amazing couple. I couldn’t ask for more. And yet I have more: my birth mother.”

In our Home section a game was kicking off to see

who could come up with the best insult for a luxury pad aimed at footballers. “Unsurprisingly tacky,” was **Chris Frankland**’s shot. **GH Timmermans** chipped in with: “Do people really aspire to such unmitigated vulgarity?” **S Jackson** took a free kick: “I thought money could buy taste, but turns out

not.” A sliding tackle from **Howard Davies**: “Some people don’t even have bad taste.” But the match-winner came from **T Barrett**: “No bookshelves, I notice.”

A debate on the difference between mindfulness and meditation flowed under Charlotte Ivers’s column, but we were most taken with

Bryan Stark’s thought: “The nearest I came was while lying on a lawn in Scotland in the pitch dark, admiring the Milky Way. We’d been to the pub. At last someone remembered how to use a key to open the cottage door, and life returned to normal.” You don’t get that from an app.

Rob Nash

COMMENT

Sarah Ditum

Men can build all the muscle they like. The beauty burden will crush them too in the end



Can a man ever be Kenough? Unless he's actually Ken, possibly not. One of the big deals of Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* movie this summer was the variety of Barbie bodies on show. Yes, the cast was led by Margot Robbie, a genuine living doll – but there was also Sharon Rooney, representing curvy Barbie. No such diversity among the Kens, who from Ryan Gosling down were washboard-torsoed models of godhead. Without at least one plus-size actress, the film would probably never have been made: sensitivity to women's body image is non-negotiable in female-focused media. Men, though, don't get the same consideration.

There's a temptation to shrug and say "so what?". Women have had centuries of being picked over, prodded and found wanting. Maybe it's just men's turn to be tyrannised by beauty standards.

Women still dominate the field when it comes to physical self-loathing. In a 2021 YouGov survey, 61 per cent of women said they felt under pressure to have the perfect body. Only 40 per cent of men felt the same – but that's a long way from "nothing". The body image gender gap seems to be closing, but only because men are more dissatisfied.

Once, it was deemed vaguely suspect for a man to be too concerned about his appearance. Yes, the ideal man was strong, but he wasn't decorative. A man was judged on his accomplishments, not on how he looked with his top off.

Now, you can hardly move for billionaires flashing their pumped-up pecs. Jeff Bezos has transformed himself from book-hawking dweeb to bronzed beefcake. Mark Zuckerberg is into Brazilian jiu-jitsu, and has abs you could break a nail on. Even Elon Musk has been hitting the Ozempic.

The fitness boom has even helped to create some new tycoons. Matt Moulding founded the supplements brand MyProtein, part of his online shopping empire The Hut Group. Ben Francis won the title of Britain's youngest billionaire thanks to his sportswear brand, Gymshark. Both are rarely shy of showing off how swollen their biceps are.

A hot body is the ultimate male status

symbol. It's the physical manifestation of your commitment to maximise the gains, whether that's in the boardroom or the squat rack. Other tokens of success – the car, the art collection, the flashy girlfriend – you can buy, but your physique is a manifestation of the labour you've poured into it. Productivity made flesh. That means it's also a status symbol that, in theory, anyone can achieve. Every superhero film promo cycle includes an interview with the star's trainer: the implication is that you, too, could have a body like Thor. All you need to do, allegedly, is follow the plan and hit your protein goals.

The possible becomes the compulsory: if you aren't getting jacked, are you anybody at all? Younger men are the most likely to be unhappy with their bodies, and they're also the most likely to be putting in heavy hours on dating apps or social media. Selfie culture, and the constant comparison enforced by the race for likes, can be just as poisonous for boys as for girls.

The deeper you fall into the fitness world of Instagram or TikTok, the more toxic it can become. You might subscribe to someone for his tips on squat form, but many brofluencers are shilling a whole philosophy of being a man – in many cases, a heavily retrograde one.

Take the Liver King, who pushed an "ancestral lifestyle" that involved eating raw meat, including liver, and being preposterously muscled. Although it turned out it wasn't the raw meat that was responsible for his frame. It was the steroids, which he denied taking until leaked emails confirmed what anyone with eyes could see.

That kind of preciousness about "juicing" is unusual. I've worked out in gyms where steroids were openly discussed, and if you drop into fitness TikTok, you'll find accounts that offer detailed advice about the best regimens.

It's hard to get good data on anabolic steroid abuse in the UK. The best estimate puts the figure at about 500,000 users – nearly all of them men. Users put themselves at risk of heart failure and might experience severe mood swings ("roid rage"). Some side effects are distinctly unmanly. Long-term use can cause shrunken testicles and a build up of breast tissue. In other

WARNER BROS



Ripped Ryan Gosling with Margot Robbie, left, in *Barbie*. Many men are tormenting themselves hunting for better bodies

words, taking steroids gives you tits. The *Love Island* contestant Thomas Powell had breast surgery last year to repair the effects of his steroid use. He said that he had no intention of coming off the drugs.

Getting big can become an obsession. As with steroids, there's a dearth of data about "bigorexia" – a form of body dysmorphia in which the sufferer believes he's never muscular enough. Partly, that's because it's a disorder that presents as "healthy" behaviour. Who'd think that a chicken fillet habit and workouts could be harmful? It's also because the problems men and boys have with their bodies have tended to be hidden. Anorexia in boys is probably underreported, and specialised treatment for male sufferers is near-impossible to find. It's a kind of fragility that goes unrecognised in males.

With "bigorexia", where the point is to obliterate your physical vulnerability under a heap of muscle, the problem is

“Male angst over how they look is on the rise. It’s hard not to feel that feminism has failed here

even more acute. Yet young men consumed by it deny themselves a social life and suffer exhaustion in their quest for a body that is always, tantalising, just slightly better than the one they have.

Men even have their own form of unpleasant plastic surgery. Abdominal etching – fine-grained liposuction to simulate the appearance of defined muscle – is a growth procedure. It's incredibly painful, not to mention ludicrous if the subject later gains weight and ends up with "abs" stretched across a beer belly. But it gets them closer to an idea of perfection.

It's hard not to feel like feminism has failed here. Men: we did try to tell you how destructive it is to be objectified. We warned you about the beauty myth. But here you are, breaking the glass ceiling in body issues. Of all the kinds of equality we could be heading towards, would anyone have chosen this? *Camilla Long is away*

One wrong note and trans police pull the plug

On holiday in Croatia, I visited the Red History Museum in Dubrovnik. Here I learnt that one of the worst miseries of communism was being constantly monitored – not by the police, but by your neighbours, who might denounce you on a whim.

I thought about that when I heard that the singer Roisin Murphy had been found guilty of "transphobia" on the basis of a single Facebook comment. She apologised for causing offence but that didn't spare her. Her label, Ninja Tune, said it would not be promoting her new album. The Rough Trade East venue in London announced that two gigs she was due to perform were cancelled.

Yet Murphy's comment was hardly an outrageous act of bigotry. She criticised puberty blockers and said "mixed-up kids are vulnerable and need to be protected". This is more or less the position of the Cass review, which found problems in NHS gender services for children.

Anyone who cared about trans people would agree that experimental treatments with serious side effects should be, at best, a line of last resort.

This kind of furore is never really about trans people, though. It's about keeping women in a state of fear. However talented you are, however carefully you make your point, your life can be smashed up in front of you if you don't follow the script.

Tomiwa Owolade

Week ending



How old will I have to be before that back-to-school feeling disappears?

I can always tell when it is Sunday. I don't need to consult a digital or manual calendar; I know intuitively. There is a certain languor in the air. Everything moves at a slower pace. I can be stuck in a cave and I will still know it is Sunday.

By the same token, I can always feel that distinctive time between late August and early September, this past week. It is the back-to-school feeling. And even though I have been out of school for nearly ten years, I still feel what I felt then: a palpable

sense of loss that summer is about to end.

At school this sense of loss manifested itself in me fretting about what more I could have done to maximise the freedom of summer. I could have watched more films, read more books, played football outside my home for longer. I could have taken more pleasure in my trip overseas. The subsequent weeks and months would be largely partitioned by school.

Today the loss is still there but generated by nothing

specific. As a journalist, my working hours are not straightforwardly delineated; I don't need to go to an office. But the end of summer feeling isn't simply one of loss. As a child I also looked forward to seeing my friends and teachers and getting back to academic work.

This has carried on. I feel that something freeing is finished. But I also sense this will be replaced by a more disciplined schedule that will furnish me with a different kind of pleasure: belonging to a community.

● Michel Houellebecq's life resembles a vulgar parody of his work. There has always been a reactionary strain in his novels, but he had the noble literary excuse of satire. He was mocking liberal pieties, not endorsing their opposite.

This isn't true anymore. He recently endorsed the Great Replacement Theory: the idea that Muslim migrants to France and their progeny will soon overwhelm the native white population.

But if you want a guide to the currents that have shaped the West in the past 25 years, you have to read Houellebecq. He has touched on Islamic terrorism, consumer capitalism, the moral and intellectual fallout from the sexual revolution.

His fellow writer Frédéric Beigbeder says of him: "He says the world is a nightmare, because we are creatures of our desires, and that individual liberty drives us to destruction and despair. He says all this, but he does the exact opposite in his life."

Twenty-five years on, his breakout work *Atomised*, like most of his others, is still worth reading.

Ancient Rome's not the place to fret about age

Much of *I, Claudius* is available on BBC iPlayer. And watching it for the first time, one thing among many that has struck me about the 1976 BBC television series is age.

Livia is the grandmother of Claudius. But the actress that plays Livia in the programme, Siân Phillips, is only five years older than the actor who plays Claudius, Derek Jacobi.

In Brian DePalma's 1983 crime drama *Scarface*, Al Pacino plays Tony Montana and Miriam Colón plays Tony's mother, Mama Montana. Yet Colón (who died in 2017) was only four years older than Pacino. Or consider the classic example of Mike Nichols's

1967 romantic drama, *The Graduate*, in which Dustin Hoffman plays a recent college graduate who is seduced by the wife of his father's law partner, Mrs Robinson, played by Anne Bancroft. Bancroft was only six years older than Hoffman. And the actor who plays Mrs Robinson's daughter, Katharine Ross, is only nine years younger than Bancroft.

I love *I, Claudius*, *Scarface* and *The Graduate*. Some see the age discrepancies between actors and characters as weaknesses in the narrative; others as an example of Hollywood sexism. I prefer to see them as defects that give each work a certain charm.



Sam Fender plays Reading

Sam's my guitar hero

I caught up with Sam Fender's performance at Reading Festival. The 29-year-old Geordie singer is prodigiously gifted. I like most of his songs, but it's his award-winning *Seventeen Going Under* that I love most.

The lyrics capture the emotions of adolescence: "That's the thing with anger / It begs to stick around / So it can fleece you of your beauty / And leave you spent with nowt to offer / Makes you hurt the ones who love you", and also tell of how he felt impotent in the face of his mother's illness.

Fender's talent, brio and passion make much of contemporary music look vapid and sterile by comparison.

Anneka, Clare

~~Jane~~ and Fi. Witty, warm and wry.

Fi Glover is joined by special guest presenters Anneka Rice and Clare Balding next week for lively conversation and a fresh look at the news.

Listen to Anneka tomorrow & Thursday and Clare on Tuesday & Wednesday, 3-5pm.

TIMESRADIO

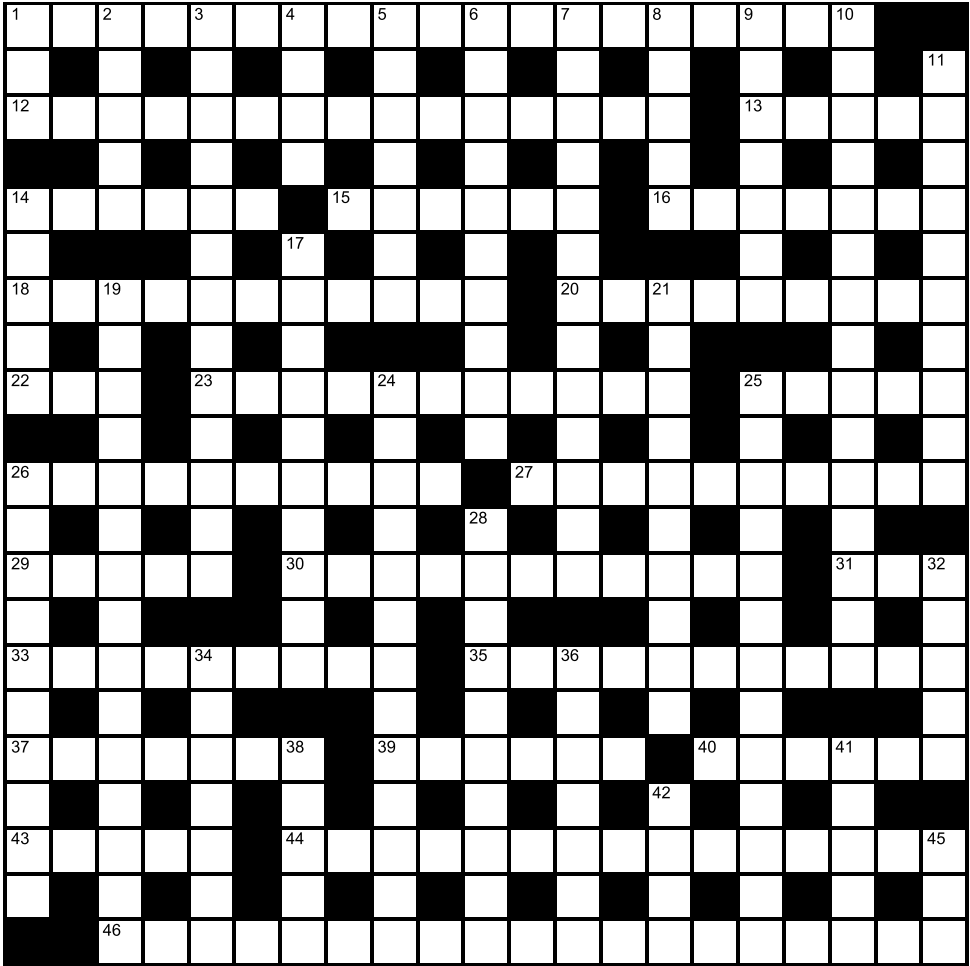
INTELLIGENT RADIO FROM THE TIMES

DAB RADIO | ONLINE | SMART SPEAKER | APP

PUZZLES

Comments about our puzzles can be sent to puzzle.feedback@sunday-times.co.uk or Puzzles Editor, The Sunday Times, 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE JUMBO CROSSWORD 386



Across

- 1 King crowned on this day in 1189 (7,3,9)
- 12 Driver of Bluebird, which exceeded 300mph on this day in 1935 (7,8)
- 13 River which runs through Grenoble (5)
- 14 The Islamic code of religious law (6)
- 15 In the Old Testament, the eleventh son of Jacob (6)
- 16 In philosophy, things as they are in themselves, rather than as they are to us through our senses (7)
- 18 Left in faulty condition (11)
- 20 Gradually liquidated, as a wasting asset (9)
- 22 The American ___ is the state tree of Massachusetts (3)
- 23 Development of an organism from earliest stage to maturity (11)
- 25 A thug or hired assassin (5)
- 26 Raw ungalvanized rubber (10)
- 27 An evening greeting in Thuringia (5,5)
- 29 An engine's ___ arm ensures spark plugs fire in turn (5)
- 30 Baikal in Siberia is the world's ___ (7,4)
- 31 Born in Slough but representing Italy, Fiona ___ won world championship long jump titles in 1995 and 2001 (3)
- 33 US name for an instrument shaped like a xylophone, but with metal bars (9)
- 35 British economy car built 1948-71 (6,5)
- 37 Pertaining to engraving or carving (7)
- 39 Former boxer ___ Klitschko is Kyiv's current mayor (6)
- 40 Medieval female headdress, later associated with nuns (6) (pictured)
- 43 Habituate (to) (5)
- 44 Italian creator of the statue depicting 1A outside the Palace of Westminster (5,10)
- 46 Location of the record-breaking event in the 12A clue (10,4,5)

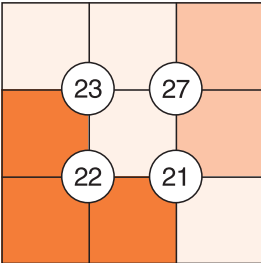


Down

- 1 Island south of Skye which also has Cuillin hills (3)
- 2 Eyelashes (5)
- 3 Rock band formed in 1969 by members of The Crazy World of Arthur Brown (6,7)
- 4 The State ___ is the lower house of the Russian parliament (4)
- 5 Listen to all another has to say (4,3)
- 6 The skill of interpreting visemes rather than phonemes (3-7)
- 7 In this exercise, a barbell is held aloft with a snatch grip (8,5)
- 8 A gas compound noted for its lack of reactivity (5)
- 9 In mathematics, an exact proper divisor (7)
- 10 Sitcom starring Rik Mayall as slimy MP Alan B'Stard (3,3,9)
- 11 Successor of Richard Nixon (6,4)
- 14 To marinate food, especially fish (5)
- 17 Solid figures with five plane faces (10)
- 19 Third and final single from Pink Floyd's album The Wall (11,4)
- 21 Actor whose roles included bait shop owner Chuck in Grumpy Old Men (1993) (5,5)
- 24 Composer of Otello and Falstaff (8,5)
- 25 The Red Army Faction was also called the ___ Group (6-7)
- 26 ___'s Supper at Emmaus is shown at the National Gallery (10)
- 28 Chancellor succeeded by Gerhard Schröder in 1998 (6,4)
- 32 Dwight ___ (pictured) is the only player from Trinidad and Tobago to be the Premier League player of the season (1998-99) (5)
- 34 Hunter changed by Artemis into a stag and killed by his own hounds (Greek myth) (7)
- 36 Puts in fresh ammunition (7)
- 38 Computer memory which allows high-speed data retrieval (5)
- 41 Ancient Jordanian city, capital of the Nabataeans (5)
- 42 James Brown was the "Godfather of ___" (4)
- 45 Based on Greek spelling, a Christogram, sometimes with an added cross, commonly used in medieval Western Europe (3)

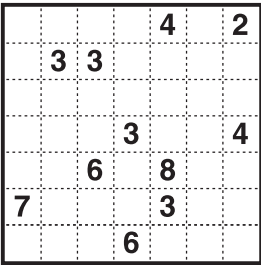


SUKO



Place the numbers 1 to 9 in the spaces so that the number in each circle is equal to the sum of the four surrounding spaces, and each colour total is correct.

CELL BLOCKS



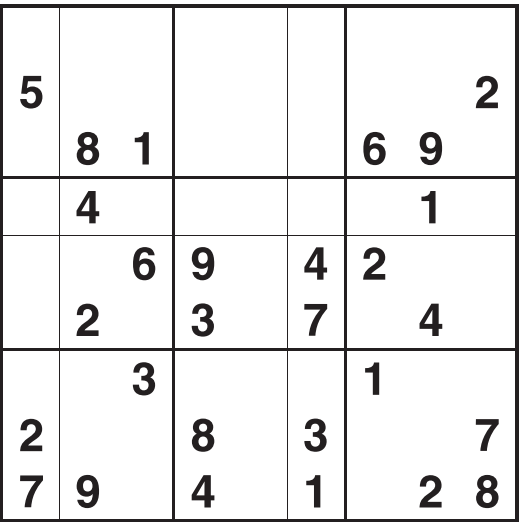
Divide the grid into square or rectangular blocks, each containing one digit only. Every block must contain the number of cells indicated by the digit inside it.

SUDOKU

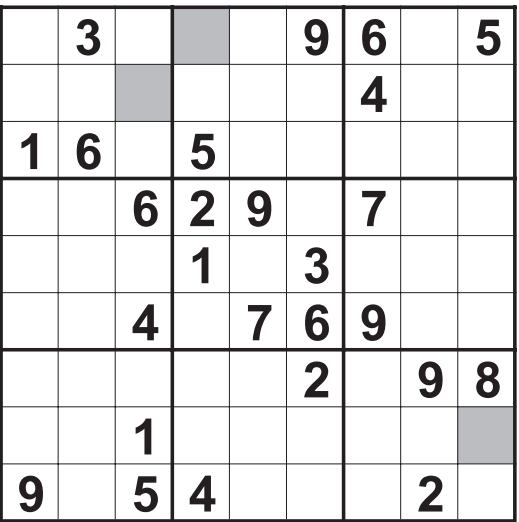
Each row, column and 3x3 box must contain the digits 1 to 9. Winners will receive a Collins English Dictionary & Thesaurus.

To enter, complete the Very Hard puzzle and call 0901 292 5275 (UK only) (ROI 1516 303 500), leaving your answer (the numbers in the three shaded squares) and contact details. Or text SUNDAY2, followed by a space, then your answer (three numbers) and contact details — eg SUNDAY2 123 John Smith, etc — to 64343 (UK only). Calls cost £1.00 (ROI £1.50) plus your telephone company's network access charge. Texts cost £1 plus your standard network charge. Winners will be picked at random from all correct answers received. Lines close at midnight on Saturday. If you call or text after this time you will not be entered but may be charged. When entering by phone or text, please provide your FULL name and address details, as incomplete entries may be charged but not entered. **STUCK?** Call our clue line to get four clues for the Very Hard puzzle on 0901 293 6265 (ROI 1514 515 120). Calls cost £1 (ROI 76c) plus your telephone company's network access charge. For full terms and conditions, visit thesundaytimes.co.uk/comprules. SP: Spoke, 0333 202 3390 (Mon-Fri 9am-5:30pm)

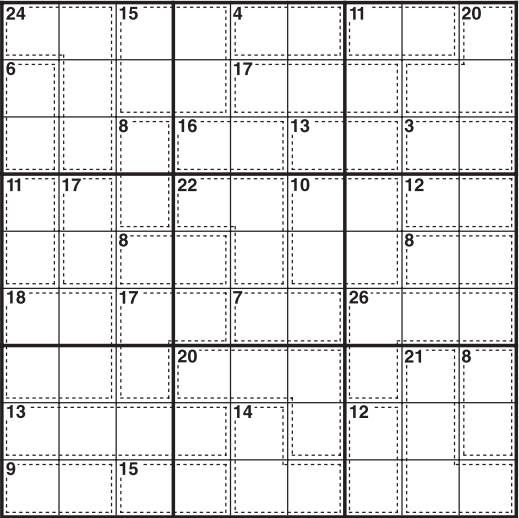
WARM-UP



VERY HARD — PRIZE 1551



KILLER SUDOKU MODERATE



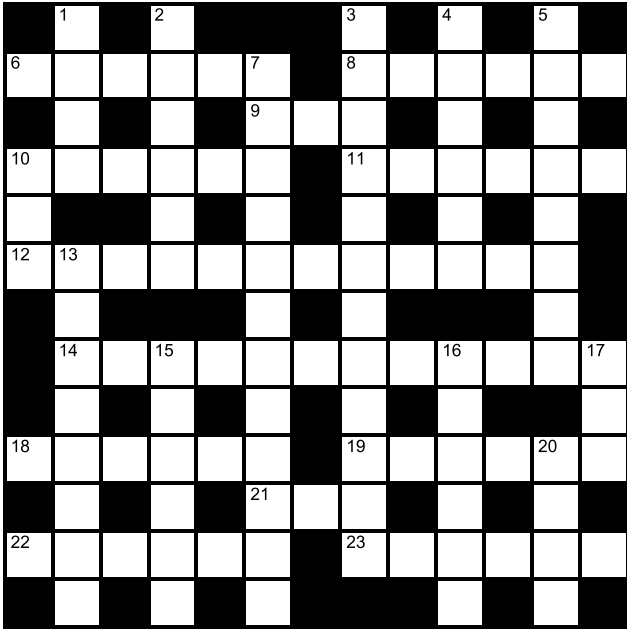
Each row, column and 3x3 box must contain the digits 1 to 9. The digits within each group of cells joined by dotted lines must add up to the figure in the top-left-hand corner of each group. Within each dotted-line group, a digit cannot be repeated.

POLYGON



From these letters, make words of four or more letters, always including the central letter. Answers must be in the Concise Oxford Dictionary, excluding capitalised words, plurals, conjugated verbs (past tense etc), adverbs ending in LY, comparatives and superlatives. **How you rate** 23 words, average; 31, good; 40, very good; 49, excellent.

CONCISE CROSSWORD 1850



Across

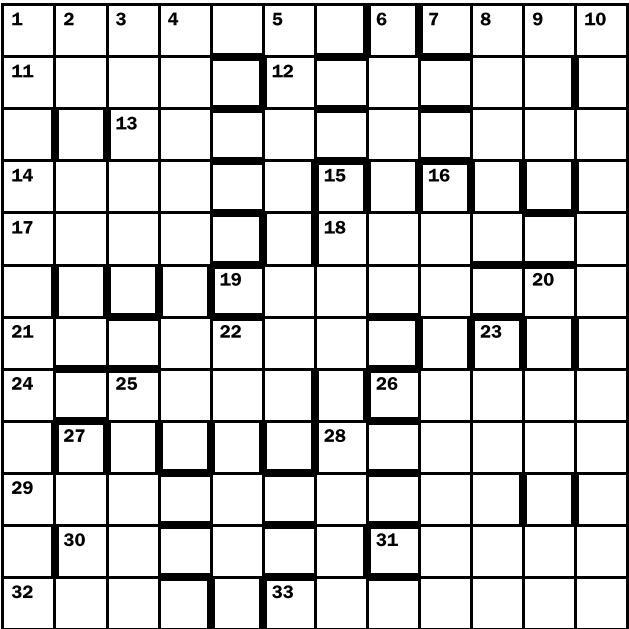
- 6 Hot desert wind (6)
- 8 Collect (6)
- 9 Afflict (3)
- 10 Return (2,4)
- 11 Please (6)
- 12 Spam (8,4)
- 14 Flattery (12)
- 18 Famous 1970s racehorse (3,3)
- 19 Consumption (6)
- 21 Top left key (3)
- 22 Dive (6)
- 23 Warning horn (6)

Down

- 1 Storage tower (4)
- 2 Work with tesserae (6)
- 3 Support staff (7,5)
- 4 Candle bracket (6)
- 5 News update (8)
- 7 Get by (4,4,4)
- 10 Take shape (3)
- 13 All-embracing term (8)
- 15 Downright (6)
- 16 Shared (6)
- 17 Draw (3)
- 20 Be familiar with (4)

MEPHISTO 3288

John Grimshaw



NAME
ADDRESS

Post your solution to The Sunday Times Mephisto 3288, PO Box 29, Colchester, Essex CO2 8GZ, or email puzzle.entries@sunday-times.co.uk

The first correct solution picked at random after next Saturday wins Collins World Atlas: Complete Edition, worth £30. The next four will receive £20 Waterstones gift vouchers. Open to 18+ UK & ROI residents only.

The Chambers Dictionary 13th edition is the primary reference. Readers may email comments or queries to puzzle.feedback@sunday-times.co.uk



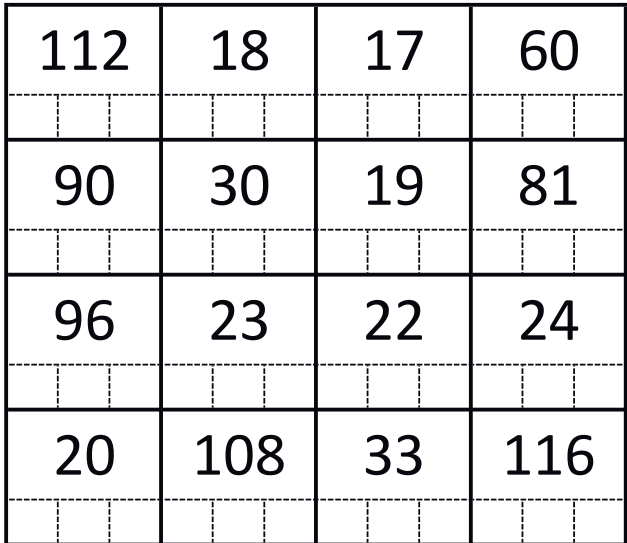
Across

- 1 Like the atlas I found in inaccurate copy – sent back (7)
- 7 Scots idiot's let out small sound of dissatisfaction (4)
- 11 Unknown third-grade rating capturing stripped down rebel ship (5)
- 12 American weed which Darwin uses for bait (6)
- 13 A talk outside Cambridge university about rarely seen particles (10)
- 14 Combined operations take in estimated attendance (6)
- 17 Affected poultry could be so upset with little time left? (5)
- 18 Large wild ox eating a shrub (6)
- 19 Impudence chap thus mostly confused with impedance (8)
- 21 Relevant earlier question covers it (8)
- 24 Gay Poulenc ballet males avoided (6)
- 26 Rice dish is more Italian with input from Louisiana (5)
- 28 Icy period induced Indian tree to go over (6)
- 29 Ship's commercial officer, purser, a cog at sea (10)
- 30 Try breaking stone? Strewth! (6)
- 31 Girl that is after golfer (5)
- 32 Mostly stony fell (4)
- 33 Excuse to stay up that could make one weary, nothing less (7, two words)

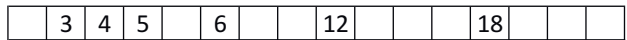
Down

- 1 Gives form to executive in triplicate. Is "Expenses" unfilled? (12)
- 2 Fog round all the way beside quiet local rivers (7, two words)
- 3 Nomogram's not serviceable form of calculator (6)
- 4 Fear of the foreign phone box being out of order, taking yen (9)
- 5 Excessive post inside American country (9, three words)
- 6 Rabbi wearing possibly Persian cloth around neck (6)
- 8 Gauge limit by resistance (5)
- 9 Chatterer at Holyrood, even under pressure (4)
- 10 More solid edging ought to feature on motorway (12, two words)
- 15 Salt endlessly unhappy thanks to ship's officer (9)
- 16 How nectar gatherers fly, totally draining empty lily (9)
- 20 Friend accepting Ian's denial about cause of weakness (7)
- 22 Address for the old elevated part of the Hebrides (6)
- 23 Sugar once boiled up in beer (6)
- 25 Primarily Shah of Persia (historic Iran) (5)
- 27 Bronchitis found in cattle hard by river (4)

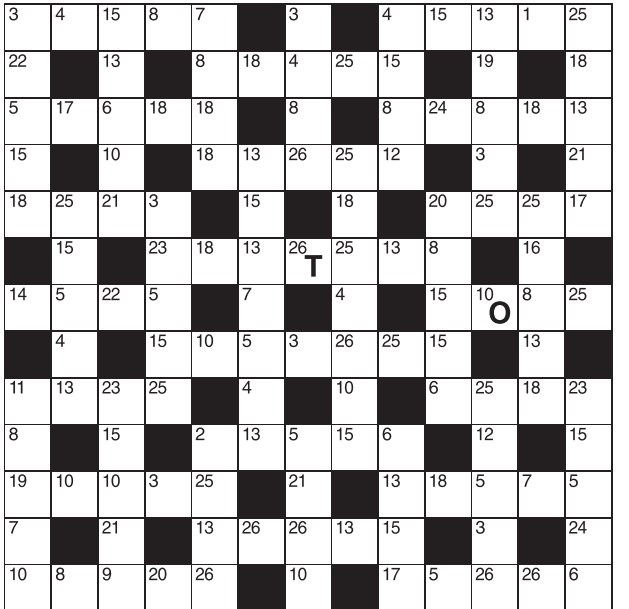
TETONOR HARD



Each number in the main grid can be formed by adding or multiplying a pair of numbers in the strip below the grid. Each pair of numbers should be used twice: once as part of an addition and once as part of a multiplication. For example, a 10 and 24 in the main grid may be solved by the sums, 4 + 6 and 4 x 6, respectively. Enter each sum in the boxes below its answer. Any blanks in the strip must be deduced, bearing in mind the numbers are listed in ascending order.

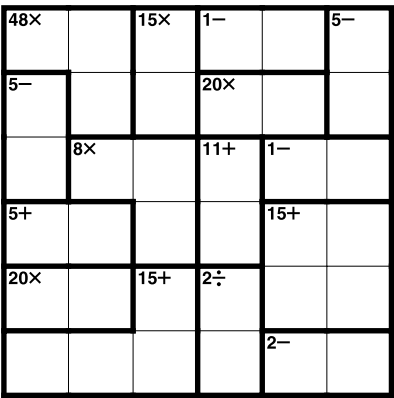


CODEWORD



In the grid, each number represents a letter of the alphabet – all 26 letters are used. Use the initial clues in the code table to work out the rest of the code. **STUCK?** To get four random extra letter clues, call 0901 293 6266 (ROI 1514 415128) or text STCLUE to 64343 (UK only). Calls cost £1 (ROI 75c) plus your telephone company's network access charge. Texts cost £1 plus your standard network charge. SP: Spoke, 0333 202 3390 (ROI 0818 205 403) (Mon-Fri 9am-5:30pm).

KENKEN



All the digits 1 to 6 must appear in every row and column. In each thick-line "block", the target number in the top left-hand corner is calculated from the digits in all the cells in the block, using the operation indicated by the symbol.

CLUE WRITING CONTEST 1984: MINISTRY OF TRUTH

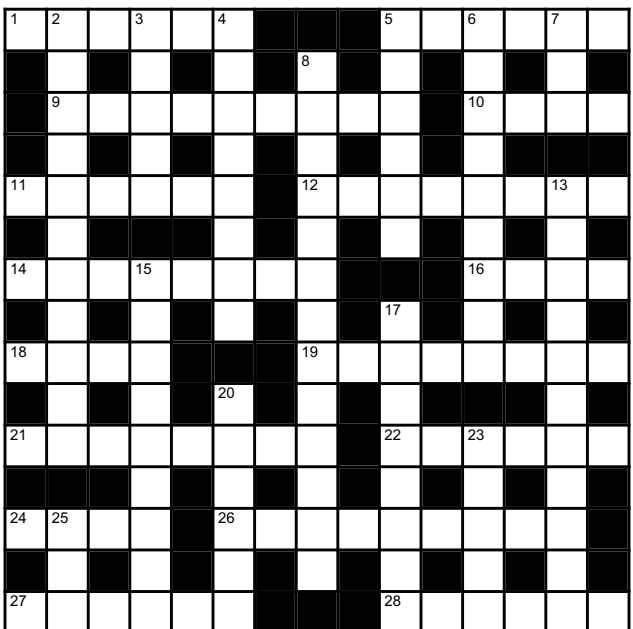
You are invited to write a clue for the word above, in our cryptic crossword style. The best entry selected after next Saturday wins a £25 Waterstones voucher. Email your entry to puzzle.entries@sunday-times.co.uk.

Winner 1981: Lynne Davis, Mill Hill, London NW7
Knife grinder: He edges closer to caution, irking ref with extremely deliberate foul

For a full report, visit thesundaytimes.co.uk/cluewriting

CROSSWORD 5075

David McLean



NAME
ADDRESS

Across

- 1 Suit covers hotel put out for Penny (6)
- 5 Duck initially spotted on eastern headland (6)
- 9 Cold drops shrouding trees (9)
- 10 Time everyone gets high (4)
- 11 Slice of pastrami, chicken or ham (6)
- 12 Broadcasting company awards (8)
- 14 Near fortune, perhaps (2,6)
- 16 Snooker champ pinching fellow's behind (4)
- 18 Raised floor builder finally installed (4)
- 19 I forgive you after a bit of banter (8)
- 21 Part-Time Lover is a hit covered by Rush (8)
- 22 Piece of illustration framed by giant old master (6)
- 24 Tedious record cut by Heart in earnest (4)
- 26 The green light in space (9)
- 27 Radio version of A Fine Romance (6)
- 28 Pure heroin smuggled into station? (6)

Down

- 2 A neat player fouled here? (7,4)
- 3 Addle-brained as Gen Y (5)
- 4 Prison gang creating trouble (8)
- 5 Always eats when one has more of a piece of cake (6)
- 6 A red latch bolted in large pen of flock? (9)
- 7 China white, not ecstasy (3)
- 8 Vehicle for woman expecting sextuplets? (6,7)
- 13 Getaway driver? (6,5)
- 15 Angry head mistakenly made bloomer (9)
- 17 Hard to fathom inner-city Tories somehow (8)
- 20 Agree working dog follows nose in chase (6)
- 23 Some student on ganja in a state (5)
- 25 Not the first to block Yahoo! (3)

The first correct solution opened after next Saturday wins a collection of reference books — The Times Universal Atlas of the World, Collins English Dictionary & Thesaurus, and Bradford's Crossword Solver's Dictionary, published by HarperCollins. Three runners-up win the Collins English Dictionary & Thesaurus. Post solutions to: The Sunday Times Crossword 5075, PO Box 29, Colchester, Essex, CO2 8GZ, or email: puzzle.entries@sunday-times.co.uk. Open to 18+ UK & ROI residents only.



Jeremy Clarkson

A four-letter word that will help fix Britain: hope



TEASER 3180

Victor Bryant

Taking The Chair
There were eight people on the committee: four men – Jingo, King, Ling and Ming,

and four women – Sheena, Tina, Una and Vina. They had to choose a chairperson from among themselves and so each of them voted for their choice, each person choosing someone of the opposite sex. Jingo's choice's choice was King. Also, Ling's

was talking to some twentysomething people on holiday in France and when I asked at one point what, in their minds, was good about Britain, there was an awkward silence. Followed by one of them saying: “Nothing.” I gave this discussion some thought in the subsequent days and I think I can see what caused such a weird response. It's because all the stuff that made my generation proud to be British is now something to be ashamed of. The Spitfire caused global warming. Winston Churchill was a racist. The British Museum is full of stolen artefacts. The empire was wrong. Our famous comedy is misogynistic. Our stiff upper lip causes mental health issues. Kenny Everett was transphobic. Led Zeppelin were guilty of cultural appropriation. And we were only able to give the world penicillin and the internet and television because of slavery. Which we invented. And which we only dropped after pressure from Abraham Lincoln.

The kids genuinely believe all this stuff, and they were therefore happy to be in France because the French have never cut off anyone's head, they welcome immigrants and, like every other country in the world, they've already achieved carbon net zero. All these things are also facts in the heads of the nation's Gen Z people. There's no point arguing because that would be mansplaining. Which is misogynist, racist and transphobic all at the same time. So we moved the debate on to today, and again they couldn't think of anything about modern Britain that made them proud. And there's no point arguing with that either, because they're right. I look at Britain today and I simply

don't know what's holding it together or how it's still functioning as a nation state. We have an air-traffic control system that collapsed because a lone pilot mistakenly said he was heading for Birmingham when he meant Bristol. And now we have a bunch of hyperbolic people stranded in hellholes like Nice and Rome saying: “It's absolute chaos.”

No, it isn't. The last days of Smyrna were “absolute chaos”. But I will admit it's a nuisance and that some IT wallah needs to be kicked down a flight of stairs and onto the dole queue.

Not that you can do that. We learnt only last week that policemen and policemenwomen can't be sacked even if they spend their evenings doing a spot of light burglary. No one can be sacked. No one can even be told off. And if you are a doctor and you go to your hospital trust with suspicions that one of the nurses is murdering babies, you will be forced to write the nurse in question a letter of apology. Because she's young and a girl and you're older and a man. So you're wrong.

And this is after God knows how many years of Conservative rule. This is supposed to be the party of common sense and of keeping things going. But it can't even get the trains to work properly, and you can't use a car to get to London instead because it's allowed the mayor to insist that everyone must arrive in the capital on the wings of an angel,

or a unicorn, or anything that doesn't emit nitrogen, or argon, or whichever gas he's taken a dislike to that week.

And while we are on the subject of London, there are now gangs running down Oxford Street helping themselves to whatever they fancy, everyone's Range Rover is stolen every four minutes and anyone with a nice watch is in grave danger of having his arm cut off by a thug with a machete. The Notting Hill Carnival went through a brief period of being fun (for anyone who's deaf) but now it's just a blood-soaked orgy of robbery and violence. And will it go ahead next year? Of course it will.

Honestly, I'm in such a state of despair about all this my shoulders have sagged so far down I'm beginning to look like an Easter Island statue. And that was before I read about 156 of the nation's schools that may have to be closed because they're made from reinforced

autoclave aerated concrete, which, it turns out, isn't quite as reinforced as parents may think. So where will kids be educated in the meantime? In a shipping container, I imagine.

Shipping containers are now used for everything. People make coffee shops out of them, and houses, and it makes my teeth itch with rage because we're not the Borrowers, for God's sake. We built Blenheim Palace. And the Humber Bridge. Using slavery, obviously, but surely we still have enough gumption to educate our children in something other than a box originally designed to ship sex toys from China.

I'm in such despair I'm beginning to look like an Easter Island statue

I'm not sure we do, though. If you want a decent plumber, you'll have to wait until we rejoin the EU. We can't build HS2. We don't have enough nuclear physicists to build a power station. Our aircraft carriers seem to break down more than they run. We have no gigabyte battery factory. And now it turns out that for the first time since 1961, our debt is greater than our entire economic output. Or, to put it another way, we are bankrupt.

Of course, a great many people think all this can be solved by Diane Abbott, Angela Redfearn, or whatever she's called, and Sir Starmer, but it can't. Not really. What we need is hope. We need to know that we've been through a terrible accident and that everything's broken, but that with the right medication, all will be well.

That's what Mrs Thatcher gave us in the Eighties. Hope. A chance to buy our houses and our national institutions and to become shareholders and make cash and beat the Argies and make Britain great again. Hoorah. Except for one small thing. To a Gen Zedder, Britain never was great. It's always been awful, it still is now and it always will be.

CHESS David Howell

The World Rapid Team Championship, the brainchild of sponsor Wadim Rosenstein, took place last week in Dusseldorf. Thirty-six teams from around the world battled for a first prize of €100,000. In the end Rosenstein's WR team, comprised of global superstars, won gold. It was refreshing to see historic romantic openings play a significant role in deciding the outcome of the tournament.

White: Ian Nepomniachtchi Black: Peter Svidler World Rapid Team Championship, Dusseldorf 2023 King's Gambit 1 e4 e5 2 f4 Once the most hotly debated of openings, the King's Gambit has become a rare guest at the top level. Computers do not approve, but there is still a psychological element that makes the gambit playable. 2... exf4 3 Nf3 Ne7 4 f5 g6 5 f6 6 f7 7 f8 8 f9 9 f10 10 f11 11 f12 12 f13 13 f14 14 f15 15 f16 16 f17 17 f18 18 f19 19 f20 20 f21 21 f22 22 f23 23 f24 24 f25 25 f26 26 f27 27 f28 28 f29 29 f30 30 f31 31 f32 32 f33 33 f34 34 f35 35 f36 36 f37 37 f38 38 f39 39 f40 40 f41 41 f42 42 f43 43 f44 44 f45 45 f46 46 f47 47 f48 48 f49 49 f50 50 f51 51 f52 52 f53 53 f54 54 f55 55 f56 56 f57 57 f58 58 f59 59 f60 60 f61 61 f62 62 f63 63 f64 64 f65 65 f66 66 f67 67 f68 68 f69 69 f70 70 f71 71 f72 72 f73 73 f74 74 f75 75 f76 76 f77 77 f78 78 f79 79 f80 80 f81 81 f82 82 f83 83 f84 84 f85 85 f86 86 f87 87 f88 88 f89 89 f90 90 f91 91 f92 92 f93 93 f94 94 f95 95 f96 96 f97 97 f98 98 f99 99 f100 100 f101 101 f102 102 f103 103 f104 104 f105 105 f106 106 f107 107 f108 108 f109 109 f110 110 f111 111 f112 112 f113 113 f114 114 f115 115 f116 116 f117 117 f118 118 f119 119 f120 120 f121 121 f122 122 f123 123 f124 124 f125 125 f126 126 f127 127 f128 128 f129 129 f130 130 f131 131 f132 132 f133 133 f134 134 f135 135 f136 136 f137 137 f138 138 f139 139 f140 140 f141 141 f142 142 f143 143 f144 144 f145 145 f146 146 f147 147 f148 148 f149 149 f150 150 f151 151 f152 152 f153 153 f154 154 f155 155 f156 156 f157 157 f158 158 f159 159 f160 160 f161 161 f162 162 f163 163 f164 164 f165 165 f166 166 f167 167 f168 168 f169 169 f170 170 f171 171 f172 172 f173 173 f174 174 f175 175 f176 176 f177 177 f178 178 f179 179 f180 180 f181 181 f182 182 f183 183 f184 184 f185 185 f186 186 f187 187 f188 188 f189 189 f190 190 f191 191 f192 192 f193 193 f194 194 f195 195 f196 196 f197 197 f198 198 f199 199 f200 200 f201 201 f202 202 f203 203 f204 204 f205 205 f206 206 f207 207 f208 208 f209 209 f210 210 f211 211 f212 212 f213 213 f214 214 f215 215 f216 216 f217 217 f218 218 f219 219 f220 220 f221 221 f222 222 f223 223 f224 224 f225 225 f226 226 f227 227 f228 228 f229 229 f230 230 f231 231 f232 232 f233 233 f234 234 f235 235 f236 236 f237 237 f238 238 f239 239 f240 240 f241 241 f242 242 f243 243 f244 244 f245 245 f246 246 f247 247 f248 248 f249 249 f250 250 f251 251 f252 252 f253 253 f254 254 f255 255 f256 256 f257 257 f258 258 f259 259 f260 260 f261 261 f262 262 f263 263 f264 264 f265 265 f266 266 f267 267 f268 268 f269 269 f270 270 f271 271 f272 272 f273 273 f274 274 f275 275 f276 276 f277 277 f278 278 f279 279 f280 280 f281 281 f282 282 f283 283 f284 284 f285 285 f286 286 f287 287 f288 288 f289 289 f290 290 f291 291 f292 292 f293 293 f294 294 f295 295 f296 296 f297 297 f298 298 f299 299 f300 300 f301 301 f302 302 f303 303 f304 304 f305 305 f306 306 f307 307 f308 308 f309 309 f310 310 f311 311 f312 312 f313 313 f314 314 f315 315 f316 316 f317 317 f318 318 f319 319 f320 320 f321 321 f322 322 f323 323 f324 324 f325 325 f326 326 f327 327 f328 328 f329 329 f330 330 f331 331 f332 332 f333 333 f334 334 f335 335 f336 336 f337 337 f338 338 f339 339 f340 340 f341 341 f342 342 f343 343 f344 344 f345 345 f346 346 f347 347 f348 348 f349 349 f350 350 f351 351 f352 352 f353 353 f354 354 f355 355 f356 356 f357 357 f358 358 f359 359 f360 360 f361 361 f362 362 f363 363 f364 364 f365 365 f366 366 f367 367 f368 368 f369 369 f370 370 f371 371 f372 372 f373 373 f374 374 f375 375 f376 376 f377 377 f378 378 f379 379 f380 380 f381 381 f382 382 f383 383 f384 384 f385 385 f386 386 f387 387 f388 388 f389 389 f390 390 f391 391 f392 392 f393 393 f394 394 f395 395 f396 396 f397 397 f398 398 f399 399 f400 400 f401 401 f402 402 f403 403 f404 404 f405 405 f406 406 f407 407 f408 408 f409 409 f410 410 f411 411 f412 412 f413 413 f414 414 f415 415 f416 416 f417 417 f418 418 f419 419 f420 420 f421 421 f422 422 f423 423 f424 424 f425 425 f426 426 f427 427 f428 428 f429 429 f430 430 f431 431 f432 432 f433 433 f434 434 f435 435 f436 436 f437 437 f438 438 f439 439 f440 440 f441 441 f442 442 f443 443 f444 444 f445 445 f446 446 f447 447 f448 448 f449 449 f450 450 f451 451 f452 452 f453 453 f454 454 f455 455 f456 456 f457 457 f458 458 f459 459 f460 460 f461 461 f462 462 f463 463 f464 464 f465 465 f466 466 f467 467 f468 468 f469 469 f470 470 f471 471 f472 472 f473 473 f474 474 f475 475 f476 476 f477 477 f478 478 f479 479 f480 480 f481 481 f482 482 f483 483 f484 484 f485 485 f486 486 f487 487 f488 488 f489 489 f490 490 f491 491 f492 492 f493 493 f494 494 f495 495 f496 496 f497 497 f498 498 f499 499 f500 500 f501 501 f502 502 f503 503 f504 504 f505 505 f506 506 f507 507 f508 508 f509 509 f510 510 f511 511 f512 512 f513 513 f514 514 f515 515 f516 516 f517 517 f518 518 f519 519 f520 520 f521 521 f522 522 f523 523 f524 524 f525 525 f526 526 f527 527 f528 528 f529 529 f530 530 f531 531 f532 532 f533 533 f534 534 f535 535 f536 536 f537 537 f538 538 f539 539 f540 540 f541 541 f542 542 f543 543 f544 544 f545 545 f546 546 f547 547 f548 548 f549 549 f550 550 f551 551 f552 552 f553 553 f554 554 f555 555 f556 556 f557 557 f558 558 f559 559 f560 560 f561 561 f562 562 f563 563 f564 564 f565 565 f566 566 f567 567 f568 568 f569 569 f570 570 f571 571 f572 572 f573 573 f574 574 f575 575 f576 576 f577 577 f578 578 f579 579 f580 580 f581 581 f582 582 f583 583 f584 584 f585 585 f586 586 f587 587 f588 588 f589 589 f590 590 f591 591 f592 592 f593 593 f594 594 f595 595 f596 596 f597 597 f598 598 f599 599 f600 600 f601 601 f602 602 f603 603 f604 604 f605 605 f606 606 f607 607 f608 608 f609 609 f610 610 f611 611 f612 612 f613 613 f614 614 f615 615 f616 616 f617 617 f618 618 f619 619 f620 620 f621 621 f622 622 f623 623 f624 624 f625 625 f626 626 f627 627 f628 628 f629 629 f630 630 f631 631 f632 632 f633 633 f634 634 f635 635 f636 636 f637 637 f638 638 f639 639 f640 640 f641 641 f642 642 f643 643 f644 644 f645 645 f646 646 f647 647 f648 648 f649 649 f650 650 f651 651 f652 652 f653 653 f654 654 f655 655 f656 656 f657 657 f658 658 f659 659 f660 660 f661 661 f662 662 f663 663 f664 664 f665 665 f666 666 f667 667 f668 668 f669 669 f670 670 f671 671 f672 672 f673 673 f674 674 f675 675 f676 676 f677 677 f678 678 f679 679 f680 680 f681 681 f682 682 f683 683 f684 684 f685 685 f686 686 f687 687 f688 688 f689 689 f690 690 f691 691 f692 692 f693 693 f694 694 f695 695 f696 696 f697 697 f698 698 f699 699 f700 700 f701 701 f702 702 f703 703 f704 704 f705 705 f706 706 f707 707 f708 708 f709 709 f710 710 f711 711 f712 712 f713 713 f714 714 f715 715 f716 716 f717 717 f718 718 f719 719 f720 720 f721 721 f722 722 f723 723 f724 724 f725 725 f726 726 f727 727 f728 728 f729 729 f730 730 f731 731 f732 732 f733 733 f734 734 f735 735 f736 736 f737 737 f738 738 f739 739 f740 740 f741 741 f742 742 f743 743 f744 744 f745 745 f746 746 f747 747 f748 748 f749 749 f750 750 f751 751 f752 752 f753 753 f754 754 f755 755 f756 756 f757 757 f758 758 f759 759 f760 760 f761 761 f762 762 f763 763 f764 764 f765 765 f766 766 f767 767 f768 768 f769 769 f770 770 f771 771 f772 772 f773 773 f774 774 f775 775 f776 776 f777 777 f778 778 f779 779 f780 780 f781 781 f782 782 f783 783 f784 784 f785 785 f786 786 f787 787 f788 788 f789 789 f790 790 f791 791 f792 792 f793 793 f794 794 f795 795 f796 796 f797 797 f798 798 f799 799 f800 800 f801 801 f802 802 f803 803 f804 804 f805 805 f806 806 f807 807 f808 808 f809 809 f810 810 f811 811 f812 812 f813 813 f814 814 f815 815 f816 816 f817 817 f818 818 f819 819 f820 820 f821 821 f822 822 f823 823 f824 824 f825 825 f826 826 f827 827 f828 828 f829 829 f830 830 f831 831 f832 832 f833 833 f834 834 f835 835 f836 836 f837 837 f838 838 f839 839 f840 840 f841 841 f842 842 f843 843 f844 844 f845 845 f846 846 f847 847 f848 848 f849 849 f850 850 f851 851 f852 852 f853 853 f854 854 f855 855 f856 856 f857 857 f858 858 f859 859 f860 860 f861 861 f862 862 f863 863 f864 864 f865 865 f866 866 f867 867 f868 868 f869 869 f870 870 f871 871 f872 872 f873 873 f874 874 f875 875 f876 876 f877 877 f878 878 f879 879 f880 880 f881 881 f882 882 f883 883 f884 884 f885 885 f886 886 f887 887 f888 888 f889 889 f890 890 f891 891 f892 892 f893 893 f894 894 f895 895 f896 896 f897 897 f898 898 f899 899 f900 900 f901 901 f902 902 f903 903 f904 904 f905 905 f906 906 f907 907 f908 908 f909 909 f910 910 f911 911 f912 912 f913 913 f914 914 f915 915 f916 916 f917 917 f918 918 f919 919 f920 920 f921 921 f922 922 f923 923 f924 924 f925 925 f926 926 f927 927 f928 928 f929 929 f930 930 f931 931 f932 932 f933 933 f934 934 f935 935 f936 936 f937 937 f938 938 f939 939 f940 940 f941 941 f942 942 f943 943 f944 944 f945 945 f946 946 f947 947 f948 948 f949 949 f950 950 f951 951 f952 952 f953 953 f954 954 f955 955 f956 956 f957 957 f958 958 f959 959 f960 960 f961 961 f962 962 f963 963 f964 964 f965 965 f966 966 f967 967 f968 968 f969 969 f970 970 f971 971 f972 972 f973 973 f974 974 f975 975 f976 976 f977 977 f978 978 f979 979 f980 980 f981 981 f982 982 f983 983 f984 984 f985 985 f986 986 f987 987 f988 988 f989 989 f990 990 f991 991 f992 992 f993 993 f994 994 f995 995 f996 996 f997 997 f998 998 f999 999 f1000 1000 f1001 1001 f1002 1002 f1003 1003 f1004 1004 f1005 1005 f1006 1006 f1007 1007 f1008 1008 f1009 1009 f1010 1010 f1011 1011 f1012 1012 f1013 1013 f1014 1014 f1015 1015 f1016 1016 f1017 1017 f1018 1018 f1019 1019 f1020 1020 f1021 1021 f1022 1022 f1023 1023 f1024 1024 f1025 1025 f1026 1026 f1027 1027 f1028 1028 f1029 1029 f1030 1030 f1031 1031 f1032 1032 f1033 1033 f1034 1034 f1035 1035 f1036 1036 f1037 1037 f1038 1038 f1039 1039 f1040 1040 f1041 1041 f1042 1042 f1043 1043 f1044 1044 f1045 1045 f1046 1046 f1047 1047 f1048 1048 f1049 1049 f1050 1050 f1051 1051 f1052 1052 f1053 1053 f1054 1054 f1055 1055 f1056 1056 f1057 1057 f1058 1058 f1059 1059 f1060 1060 f1061 1061 f1062 1062 f1063 1063 f1064 1064 f1065 1065 f1066 1066 f1067 1067 f1068 1068 f1069 1069 f1070 1070 f1071 1071 f1072 1072 f1073 1073 f1074 1074 f1075 1075 f1076 1076 f1077 1077 f1078 1078 f1079 1079 f1080 1080 f1081 1081 f1082 1082 f1083 1083 f1084 1084 f1085 1085 f1086 1086 f1087 1087 f1088 1088 f1089 1089 f1090 1090 f1091 1091 f1092 1092 f1093 1093 f1094 1094 f1095 1095 f1096 1096 f1097 1097 f1098 1098 f1099 1099 f1100 1100 f1101 1101 f1102 1102 f1103 1103 f1104 1104 f1105 1105 f1106 1106 f1107 1107 f1108 1108 f1109 1109 f1110 1110 f1111 1111 f1112 1112 f1113 1113 f1114 1114 f1115 1115 f1116 1116 f1117 1117 f1118 1118 f1119 1119 f1120 1120 f1121 1121 f1122 1122 f1123 1123 f1124 1124 f1125 1125 f1126 1126 f1127 1127 f1128 1128 f1129 1129 f1130 1130 f1131 1131 f1132 1132 f1133 1133 f1134 1134 f1135 1135 f1136 1136 f1137 1137 f1138 1138 f1139 1139 f1140 1140 f1141 1141 f1142 1142 f1143 1143 f1144 1144 f1145 1145 f1146 1146 f1147 1147 f1148 1148 f1149 1149 f1150 1150 f1151 1151 f1152 1152 f1153 1153 f1154 1154 f1155 1155 f1156 1156 f1157 1157 f1158 1158 f1159 1159 f1160 1160 f1161 1161 f1162 1162 f1163 1163 f1164 1164 f1165 1165 f1166 1166 f1167 1167 f1168 1168 f1169 1169 f1170 1170 f1171 1171 f1172 1172 f1173 1173 f1174 1174 f1175 1175 f1176 1176 f1177 1177 f1178 1178 f1179 1179 f1180 1180 f1181 1181 f1182 1182 f1183 1183 f1184 1184 f1185 1185 f1186 1186 f1187 1187 f1188 1188 f1189 1189 f1190 1190 f1191 1191 f1192 1192 f1193 1193 f1194 1194 f1195 1195 f1196 1196 f1197 1197 f1198 1198 f1199 1199 f1200 1200 f1201 1201 f1202 1202 f1203 1203 f1204 1204 f1205 1205 f1206 1206 f1207 1207 f1208 1208 f1209 1209 f1210 1210 f1211 1211 f1212 1212 f1213 1213 f1214 1214 f1215 1215 f1216 1216 f1217 1217 f1218 1218 f1219 1219 f12



THE WORLD IS YOUR OYSTER

This is our Oyster case, the world's first waterproof wristwatch case, conceived by Rolex in 1926 and patented. A one-of-a-kind feature, which holds within it an intricate world of cogs and minutely crafted parts. Made of some of the most refined alloys, the Oyster case is incomparably resistant to all sorts of external aggressions. Yet no object so hermetic, so immovable, has ever opened the door to so many

possibilities. With its original patented design consisting of a bezel, a case back and a winding crown screwed down against the middle case, it profoundly changed the course of watchmaking history and set new standards of waterproofness for all wristwatches. To this day, the Oyster case continues to protect our watches and our movements within them. It stands as undeniable proof of our constant quest for reliability.

#Perpetual

BUCHERER
1888

ROLEX BOUTIQUE, ONE HYDE PARK, KNIGHTSBRIDGE
ROLEX BOUTIQUE, WONDER ROOM, SELFRIDGES LONDON
ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, THE PIAZZA COVENT GARDEN
THE VILLAGE, WESTFIELD WHITE CITY LONDON
BUCHERER.COM


ROLEX

SPORT



Charity condemns 'terrible' Greenwood loan move

Nick Greenslade

The first signs of a backlash against Mason Greenwood's season-long loan move to La Liga club Getafe – announced by Manchester United late on Friday night – appeared in Spain yesterday when a leading domestic abuse charity in the country said that Getafe had set “a terrible example”.

Ana Bella Estévez, a domestic abuse survivor who started the Ana Bella Foundation, told the Mirror: “Getafe executives should never have hired Mason Greenwood and should immediately overturn their decision. If you're a public-facing organisation like Getafe there is no excuse to take a neutral stance on violence against women – you must take moral responsibility.”

United had suspended Greenwood in January 2022 over allegations relating to a young woman after images and videos were posted online. He faced charges including attempted rape and assault, but the Crown Prosecution Service announced in February that the case had been discontinued. He denied the charges.

Asked about the decision to sign the one-cap England international after his side's 2-1 league defeat away to Real Madrid yesterday, the Getafe head coach José Bordalás defended the decision to hand the 21-year-old a way back into football.

“It is a very delicate situation to trivialise that issue,” he said. “Everyone knows what happened and appropriate measures were taken.”

“He is a footballer of a very high level and arrives at Getafe with enormous enthusiasm.”

Asked if signing Greenwood, who did not join in time to be registered for the matchday squad at the Bernabéu, could prompt an unfavourable reaction, Bordalás added: “I can only speak at a footballing level. We all know the potential he has.”

“He is a very young boy and we hope that he adapts to a very different league.”

“He wants to recover his professional status and Getafe can help him in that sense.”

GETAFE FANS' REACTION, PAGE 5

Money for nothing



Ferguson scored a hat-trick in Brighton's win over Newcastle while Elanga, right, celebrates his winner for Forest against Chelsea with Morgan Gibbs-White

Forest and Brighton humble big spenders Chelsea and Newcastle, pages 2-5

LIZ FINLAYSON/SHUTTERSTOCK; MARK GREENWOOD/IPS/SHUTTERSTOCK

Inside

Danny Cipriani exclusive

• ‘I slept with everyone but just felt dejected when it was over’



• ‘Sam Burgess was removed from the England Whatsapp group after hanging out with me’



• ‘I said to Stuart Lancaster: You copped out, mate’

Pages 20-21

Plus

• Eight-page Rugby World Cup preview featuring Stephen Jones, Stuart Barnes, Lawrence Dallaglio, Shane Horgan and Benjamin Kayser



COOPER'S FORMULA STUNS CHELSEA



0-1

ChelseaNottingham Forest

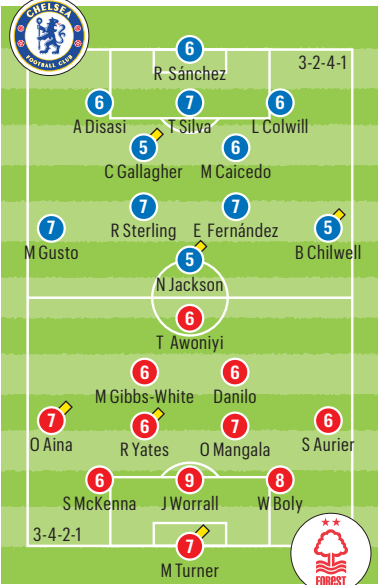
Elanga 48



Jonathan Northcroft
Football Correspondent
at Stamford Bridge

This time last year Nottingham Forest were the ones ridiculed for their transfers, the club struggling for stability in a sea of pressure and noise. Now it is Chelsea and they were back, those full-time boos at Stamford Bridge. Mauricio Pochettino is charged with the task of bringing direction and a successful formula to a club challenged by the hyperactivity of their recruiters and owners.

He could do worse than study Steve Cooper. Over the past 12 months one of the best managerial jobs, by anyone anywhere, has been done by this humble, empathetic Welshman. Here, the day after losing his star player in Brennan Johnson – shipped



Star man Joe Worrall (Nottingham Forest)
Substitutions: Chelsea Palmer (for Gallagher 62min, 7), Madueke (for Chilwell 62, 6), Maatsen (for Caicedo 77), Mudryk (for Gusto 77).
Nottingham Forest Elanga (for Danilo 45+3, 8), Wood (for Awoniyi 65, 6), Montiel (for Aurier 72), Tavares (for Mangala 72), Kouyaté (for Aina 73).
Sub booked Tavares.
Referee T Robinson. Attendance 39,820.

to Tottenham Hotspur – Cooper engineered a famous win, Forest's first at Stamford Bridge in 28 years, built on the unity and identity with which he has infused his club.

Built, despite all last season's buying, selling and the scrutiny that

followed a difficult start back in the top flight. Built on intensity, resilience, teamwork and a clever way of creating little moments of advantage against superior foes.

His goal hero was a bargain recruit from Manchester United, Anthony Elanga, and his rock was the player who embodies his team more than any other: big Joe Worrall. It is down to Pochettino to make signings work and discover leaders in his ranks in a similar way.

Colossal does not even begin to describe Worrall's performance. His courage and heft are never in doubt, but here he brought levels of concentration and anticipation that made him the mighty oak at the Forest heart which Chelsea just could not edge past. A week ago he lost his uncle, Sergeant Graham Saville, a response officer who died when hit by a train while trying to save a man in distress on rail tracks near Newark-on-Trent.

"He's been incredible," Cooper said. "He's put himself second for his family, for the football club. The guys just showed him a huge amount of respect in the dressing room after what he's been through."

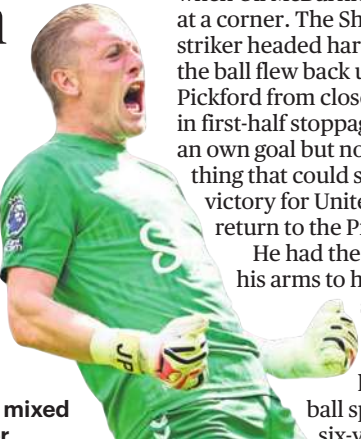
"I cannot speak highly enough of the man he's been over the last week or so. I know how important today will be for him and it will give him and his family some respite, because nothing can really make what happened any better, but at least it gives them some nice feelings."

Worrall was unjustly sent off in last



Elanga came off the bench to score his first goal since joining Forest from Manchester United this summer

Pickford pulls out the stops to grab first point for Everton



Pickford registers his delight on what was a mixed day for the goalkeeper

2

Sheffield United

Archer 33, Pickford (og) 45+3'

2

Everton

Doucouré 14, Danjuma 55

Martin Hardy

It was the ninth minute of injury-time – there were supposed to be six – when Oli McBurnie towered in the air at a corner. The Sheffield United striker headed hard and down, and the ball flew back up at Jordan Pickford from close range. Pickford, in half-stoppage time, had scored an own goal but now he was the only thing that could stop a dramatic first victory for United since their return to the Premier League.

He had the reactions to thrust his arms to his right at full stretch to send the ball on to the crossbar. The Kop held its breath. The ball spun back into the six-yard area, where

McBurnie's desire and creativity helped him get to it first and he stabbed the ball goalwards. This time it bounced off the head of the still-grounded Pickford and went right, to where it clipped the upright. The drama was not finished. Vini Souza was alert and ready to shoot from close range when Pickford, still grounded, dragged the ball to safety with an outstretched left leg. Seconds later the game finished and McBurnie and Pickford fell to their knees at the corner of the penalty area, looked at each other, stood up and hugged.

"It is a big moment," Paul Heckingbottom, the United manager, said. "It is another example of why we love the game and how fine the margins are. We know we need those moments to go in our favour. It was a good game and a fair result."

Both teams remain winless in the Premier League, but it is not for want of trying. Everton look a bit more like a Sean Dyche side and carry more of a goal threat but the two teams meet again on the penultimate day of the season and it would be a brave bet to say that it will not mean something in

terms of relegation for at least one of them. "It was a useful point, but there is frustration that we let in two soft goals," Dyche, the Everton manager, said.

His team led early on thanks to a corner from the right headed down by Amadou Onana which clipped the leg of Abdoulaye Doucouré and had Wes Foderingham scrambling low to his right, from where he could only palm the ball back to Doucouré. The midfielder stabbed it in.

The reply that brought Sheffield United level in the 33rd minute was a goal of precision. Gustavo Hamer crossed with pace from the right and McBurnie rolled it into the path of Cameron Archer, who fired a right-footed shot beyond Pickford.

202

Sheffield United had a half-time lead for the first time in 202 Premier League games after conceding the opening goal

In first-half injury-time, Archer hit a curling right-footed shot that cannoned off the far post and struck the back of the by-now-grounded Pickford and flew into the net.

Nathan Patterson was excellent at right back for Dyche's men, and his cross in the 55th minute was low and with real pace and it fizzed across the six-yard box, to where Arnaut Danjuma had positioned himself. He would produce a first-time, left-foot finish, right in front of the visiting support. Their delight would turn to relief, just like their manager's. "It was a brilliant double save," Dyche added. "How mad is football? But it would have been an injustice if we had lost."

Star man Gustavo Hamer (Sheff Utd).
Sheff Utd (5-3-2): W Foderingham 6 — G Baldock 7, A Ahmedhodzic 6, J Egan 7 (C Basham 68min, 4), J Robinson 6, Y Larouci 6 (L Thomas 68, 5) — O Norwood 6, V Souza 7, G Hamer 8 — O McBurnie 7, C Archer 7 (B Traoré 75). Booked Ahmedhodzic.
Everton (4-3-3): J Pickford 7 — N Patterson 8, J Tarkowski 7 (B Godfrey 90), J Branthwaite 6, A Young 6 — A Doucouré 7, I Gueye 6, A Onana 7 — J Garner 6 (D McNeil 75), Beto 7, A Danjuma 8. Booked Branthwaite, Doucouré.
Referee A Madley.

MARK PAIN/PREMIUM SPORTS IMAGES



Game in 60 seconds

STAR MAN
Joe Worrall

DAY TO FORGET FOR...

Nicolas Jackson, right
The forward spurned a late equaliser by putting the ball over the crossbar from four yards

KEY MOMENT

Moisés Caicedo's error that led to the Forest winner

WHAT THE MANAGERS SAID

Mauricio Pochettino
We made a mistake and then we created opportunities, but if you don't score it is difficult to win games

Steve Cooper

He's been incredible [talking of Joe Worrall, whose police officer uncle had just died]. He's put his family second for the football club



2

Nottingham Forest have only two of their 22 Premier League games since returning to the top flight last season

1

This was Forest's first Premier League away win in London this century. Their last one was in March 1999 against Wimbledon

Saturday's defeat at Old Trafford, where Forest deserved more and Cooper paid tribute to his players for keeping their belief and sticking to the strategies he has devised for playing against the bigger clubs despite that disappointment and a similar one at Arsenal.

"We've had a lot of culture meetings this year and talked about how we grow and one thing we all agree on is if we want more results like today it comes from within, comes from the internal," Cooper said.

Pochettino will have to wait a while to stage the meetings and training sessions that could hasten Chelsea's reboot – ruefully, he smiled that he'll be left with "about four players" after the vast majority of his teeming squad disappear for international break. Adding to Chelsea's frustrations – writ on the thunderous face of co-owner Behdad Eghbali as he stomped across the pitch at the end – was that the first error leading to Elanga's 48th-minute strike was made by £115 million British record signing Moisés Caicedo.

Forest's goal was an ambush – Cooper's midfield converged on Caicedo in the centre circle, forcing an untidy touch. Conor Gallagher was ponderous trying to gather the loose ball and coughed up possession. Taiwo Awoniyi powered forward and slid a pass through Thiago Silva's legs to release Elanga.

Very few in the Premier League can outpace the young Swede but Elanga also had the quality and calmness to slow things down and pass home a neat finish. A replacement for the injured Danilo in first-half stoppage time, Elanga was electric to the last, going on a solo break in the 96th minute, keeping the ball under pressure from Mykhailo Mudryk before spinning skilfully and hammering a powerful shot that Robert Sánchez did well to save.

Another star performer was Tim Robinson, the referee, whose welcome permissiveness towards physical contact allowed for tough, competitive, flowing play. Yellow cards were reserved for cynicism, like when Ola Aina pulled back Raheem Sterling and Gallagher tripped Aina. There was a caution under new PGMOL guidelines for Nicolas Jackson, for

“

It is down to Pochettino to make signings work and find the leaders in his ranks

brandishing an imaginary yellow card after being felled by Ryan Yates.

Jackson started brightly but fizzled and Pochettino admitted lessons like these are what his many young stars need to build resilience. Had Chelsea capitalised on their early attacking things would have been very different, he believed. But Aina timed a terrific challenge to thwart Sterling and when Jackson drove forward to release Sterling, who angled a great pass to the back post, Ben Chilwell could not quite reach it.

For all their energy and movement, Chelsea rarely found the final pass. When they did, Worrall was impassable, sliding in for a tremendous block on Jackson and flinging himself in front of a Caicedo drive. Willy Boly was similarly heroic when stopping a Jackson shot. Forest always found ways to trouble Chelsea, mostly with fast, coordinated counterattacks and quality balls played into the box. Awoniyi blasted the chance of the game over when a Silva block dropped his way.

On his debut, Cole Palmer was the best of Chelsea's substitutes, with his cleverness in possession and desire to get on the ball and make a difference. In the 82nd minute he released Sterling, who rounded Worrall and cut back for Jackson – who toed his shot over the open goal from five yards out. In the final moments, Sterling drove his best opportunity wide and, in the sunshine, the Forest fans chorused "Cheerio!"

Mbeumo's late leveller rescues wasteful Brentford

2 Brentford
Jensen 7, Mbeumo 90+3

2 Bournemouth
Solanke 30, Brooks 77



Rob Stewart

They might have extended their unbeaten run but any notion that Brentford can prosper without Ivan Toney was dispelled by a litany of missed chances that almost enabled Bournemouth to claim a first Premier League win of the season.

Bryan Mbeumo's stoppage-time goal salvaged a point and a third draw in four matches for the home side goal. It denied Bournemouth a rare win in these parts – they have only one victory in 15 visits – after the substitute David Brooks had put them ahead with 13 minutes left. In the first half Dominic Solanke had cancelled out Mathias Jensen's early opener.

This error-strewn but entertaining contest made it abundantly clear why Brentford – missing Toney until January because of breaches of FA gambling rules – decided to bring back Neal Maupay on loan from Everton. Thomas Frank, the head coach, was still happy with the overall performance, though. "If we play like this 100 times, we'll win 98, draw one and lose one," he said. "We

should have won but the never-say-die spirit was there for all to see."

The tone was set for a topsy-turvy game during frenetic opening exchanges when the Bournemouth goalkeeper, Neto, gave Brentford a helping hand not once but twice.

First, he gave away a free kick when he stuck the boot in on Kevin Schade before being caught off guard by Jensen's subsequent set piece, despite initially appearing to have pawed the ball to safety. For a second it seemed as if Neto would have a lucky escape as the referee's wristwatch goal-line technology failed to work, but the fourth official stepped in and the goal was given.

Schade should have doubled the lead but crashed a shot off Neto's left-hand post. At the other end, Solanke equalised on 30 minutes when he bamboozled Ben Mee before thumping a low shot between the centre back's legs and beyond the goalkeeper, Mark Flekken.

Mbeumo curled a shot wide and Vitaly Janelt headed at Neto as Brentford stepped it up after the interval. Yoane Wissa struck a post



Mbeumo steers the Brentford equaliser past the goalkeeper Neto

after he skipped past defenders before Keane Lewis-Potter also hit the woodwork from a cross.

Brooks then had what appeared to be the final say, knocking the ball in after Rico Henry had made a meal of his attempted back pass. Marcus Tavernier picked up possession and squared to the Wales international for the lead.

But back came Brentford and Mbeumo produced a composed

finish, pouncing after Milos Kerkez failed to cut out a through ball.

Star man Dominic Solanke (Bournemouth). **Brentford** (4-3-3): M Flekken 6 — A Hickey 7 (M Olakigbe 82min), E Pinnock 6, B Mee 6 (N Collins 82), R Henry 6 — M Jensen 7 (K Ajer 82), C Norgaard 6, V Janelt 7 (F Onyeka 71) — B Mbeumo 6, Y Wissa 6, K Schade 7 (K Lewis-Potter 71). **Booked** M Jensen. **Bournemouth** (4-2-3-1): Neto 5 — M Aarons 7, I Zabarnyi 6, M Senesi 7, M Kerkez 6 — R Christie 7 (C Mepham 88), L Cook 6 — A Semenyo 6 (D Brooks 60, 7) P Billing 6, J Kluivert 6 — D Solanke 8. **Booked** Neto. **Referee** R Madley.

Haaland treble keeps City cruising in second gear



5-1



Manchester City

Álvarez 31, Aké 45+5, Haaland 58, 70 (pen), 90+5

Fulham

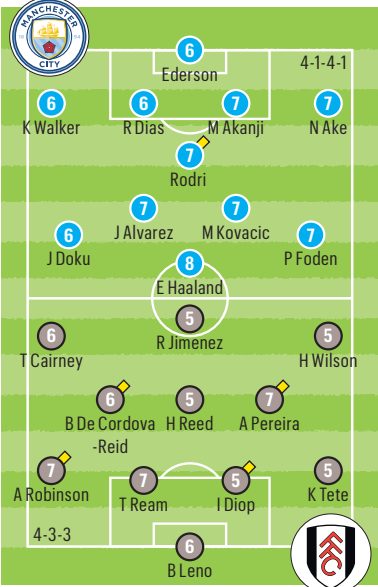
Ream 33

Ian Whittell

The fifth hat-trick of Erling Haaland's Premier League career concealed the fact that the Manchester City juggernaut is still idling in second gear at the start of the new campaign, with his team even needing an assist from VAR to throttle the life out of yet another outmatched opponent.

That moment came deep in first-half stoppage time when Nathan Aké's powerful header, from a Phil Foden corner, flew past Bernd Leno in the Fulham goal, but only after Manuel Akanji, clearly offside, had shown balletic footwork to avoid contact with it.

A bizarrely long VAR delay ruled that Akanji had neither touched the ball, nor blocked the goalkeeper's vision, the only two conditions that



Star man Erling Haaland (Man City). **Substitutions:** Man City B Silva (for Rodri 75min), S Gomez (for Doku 75), K Phillips (for Kovacic 83), R Lewis (for Alvarez 90), O Bobb (for Foden 90). **Booked** Silva. **Fulham** Willian (for DeCordova-Reid 73), T Castagne (for Tete 73), R Muniz (for Jiménez 81), A Traoré (for Wilson 81). **Referee** M Oliver.

would have deemed him to have been interfering with play, although Marco Silva, the Fulham manager, was not impressed by the interpretation.

"Everyone that plays football, that played football, that has some knowledge of football, they are 100 per cent sure to disallow that goal," Silva said.

"For the linesman, it can be difficult [to judge] an offside decision; for VAR, it is impossible not to disallow that goal. It is clear he's in line with the ball, he pulls away from the line of the ball and the ball goes in his direction.

"About the delay, I don't know why it was so long – it was embarrassing. I don't know why it was so long but the moment made a huge impact in the game."

By the final whistle, that flashpoint, with the game tied at 1-1, looked irrelevant, with Haaland helping himself to a 32-minute second-half hat-trick, but it clearly drastically altered the momentum of the contest.

"A similar thing happened in our last match against Sheffield United," Juanma Lillo, the stand-in City manager, said. "We thought it was offside as well but they said it was about being in line with the ball. That was the explanation and I believe Manuel was less in line with the ball than happened against Sheffield."

Without the presence of Pep Guardiola, recovering from back surgery, and the injured Jack Grealish and Kevin De Bruyne, City lacked their usual creative spark and toiled before taking the lead after 31 minutes through Julián Álvarez.

That goal, too, featured Haaland, although it was a poorly hit shot from Mateo Kovacic's defence-splitting pass that rolled into the line of Álvarez to convert from close range.

But a sign of how below par City were was the fact they held onto that lead for less than two minutes when an Andreas Pereira corner was turned goalwards by Raúl Jiménez for Bobby DeCordova-Reid to force a save out of

Haaland enjoys his second goal before completing his first hat-trick of the season and seventh for City



Game in 60 seconds



STAR MAN Erling Haaland

DAY TO FORGET FOR... Tony Harrington VAR Harrington could just have asked the referee to look at the monitor

KEY MOMENT The controversial

"offside" goal scored by Nathan Aké, left

WHAT THE MANAGERS SAID Juanma Lillo This guy [Haaland] was born scoring goals and he'll go through his whole life scoring goals

Marco Silva I tried to tell them not to lose focus from things we cannot control but that moment [Aké's goal] made a huge impact on them

“For VAR, it is impossible not to disallow that goal. The moment made a huge impact

‘We’re just getting started,’ insists Postecoglou as Son hits hat-trick

2

Burnley

Foster 4, Brownhill 90+4

5

Tottenham

Son 16, 63, 66, Romero 45+2, Maddison 54

Charlotte Duncker

Son Heung-min grabbed a hat-trick and James Maddison again shone for Tottenham Hotspur, but it was the man on the touchline who stole the hearts of the supporters.

Ange Postecoglou was the last man off the pitch as he applauded the fans who had spent much of the game serenading him as his side ran out 5-2 winners over Burnley at Turf Moor.

The Australian has only been in position a few months but he is already starting to resemble a saviour, with Spurs looking

unrecognisable from the conservative, sometimes tedious side managed by Antonio Conte. They are now a free-flowing, attacking outfit who looked capable of scoring every time they pushed forward. The Spurs supporters, delighted with what they were watching, responded with: "We've got our Tottenham back."

And the good news for Tottenham fans is that Postecoglou said this was only the beginning of the revolution.

"I've got a picture in my head about what I want the team to look like and I keep saying we're still at the beginning of it, we're still building and there's a lot to be done. It's about putting all the pieces together. There

Son scored his fourth Premier League hat-trick in an easy win



are some really good footballers in this club and they have the ability to play in the way this team needs," the Spurs head coach said.

In just a few weeks he has managed to get Son and Maddison linking up in a way that makes them look as if they have played together for years. The Spurs captain scored three but it was the £40 million man from Leicester City who really stole the show.

The 26-year-old pulled the strings, roaming behind the front line and toying with the Burnley defenders in the box as he found space for himself to unleash dangerous balls and create chance after chance.

He got the goal his performance deserved with a perfectly placed right-footed strike from outside the area in the 54th minute and it was clear there would be no coming back for Burnley.

JAMES GILL/DANEHOUSE/GETTY IMAGES



Ederson, with Tim Ream tapping home the rebound. It was untidy, but no more than Fulham deserved, having effectively stifled City and Haaland for 45 minutes, but the second half was a very different prospect.

On 58 minutes Haaland maintained his goal-a-game average when superb passing between Akanji and Rodri ended with Álvarez flicking through a ball that took a fortunate touch off Ream into the stride of the City No 9, who finished with no fuss.

It was now a question of how many goals the champions would win by and a rash foul by Issa Diop on Álvarez after 70 minutes allowed City to extend that number by one.

Haaland, who missed a Premier League penalty for the first time away to Sheffield United last week, made no further mistake, firmly ramming home his fifth goal of the season.

The Norwegian completed what was now a rout when he swept in from 12 yards in the fifth minute of stoppage time after skilful work and a clever cross from the substitute Sergio Gómez.

It meant that Haaland has now started this season in the same manner as last, even down to the cadence of his strike rate: two goals in the opening game, one in the second, a blank and then a hat-trick in his fourth.

His fifth Premier League hat-trick, the seventh of his City career, puts Haaland joint ninth on the league's all-time hat-trick chart along with names like Ian Wright, Andy Cole, Ruud van Nistelrooy and Robin van Persie. Not a bad return, 39 games into his career.

It opened up the prospect of Haaland emulating the 52-goal debut campaign he enjoyed a year ago. "This guy was born scoring goals," Lillo said. "He has gone through his whole life scoring goals, I won't be surprised if he gets the same figure. But it doesn't matter if he doesn't. He showed today [that] he is great providing for others. I'm more impressed by other figures, not just what he ends up with in the scoring charts."

Still, those scoring charts make sobering reading for City's rivals who might have expected a drop-off in the Norwegian's productivity for that "difficult" second season, especially with Guardiola due back after the international break.

"We need him here and I miss him," Lillo said of his manager. The rest of the Premier League will presumably not share that sentiment.

Vincent Kompany said there is not a bigger step up in world football than from the Sky Bet Championship to the Premier League but that is not going to prevent his side from playing the attractive football which saw them promoted so comfortably last season.

They showed they are still capable of playing with flair and Lyle Foster and Luca Koleosho provided Pedro Porro and Destiny Udogie with some difficult moments.

The home pairing could hardly have had a better start as Foster scored his second of the season to give Burnley the lead after four minutes.

Koleosho outmuscled Porro down the left and crossed for Foster, who finished past Guglielmo Vicario with his first touch. But there was still a naivety to their performance, which was reflected in the scoreline.

"I've spent 11 years of my life in the Premier League, so I have a pretty good understanding of the level," Kompany said. "I don't think anyone is naive going into this division – we know it is a challenge if you look at the total amount of points the three promoted teams have got this season. There were positives but not enough to compete with them."

While at times the attack looked like it belonged in this division, the defence seemed like it is going to struggle. Spurs' goals were good quality – their first was a nice give and go between Manor Solomon and Son, the second a Cristian Romero rocket, the third a Maddison curling effort, and the fourth and fifth moments of quality from Son.

For their fourth, Postecoglou's side walked through the Burnley back line. Solomon played it to Son inside the area, who fired past James

Trafford in goal. Some of the home support had seen enough and headed for the exit after 65 minutes. Four minutes later, Son wrapped up his hat-trick.

Josh Brownhill got a consolation goal deep into stoppage time but it looks like it is going to be a tough journey for Burnley this season. For Spurs, it appears to be the start of something exciting.

Star man Son Heung-min (Tottenham). **Burnley** (4-4-2): P Trafford 6 — C Roberts 5, A Al Dakhil 4, D O'Shea 4, J Beyer 4 (J Cork 74min) — J Gudmundsson 6 (H Delcroix 46, 6), J Cullen 6, S Berge 7 (J Brownhill 46, 6), L Koleosho 7 (J Larsen 68, 6) — Z Amdouni 5 (N Redmond 60, 6), L Foster 7. **Booked** Gudmundsson, Brownhill, Delcroix, Beyer. **Tottenham** (4-3-3): G Vicario 6 — P Porro 6, C Romero 6, M van de Ven 6, D Udogie 6 — P Sarr 7 (P Hojberg 68), Y Bissouma 7 — J Maddison 9 (E Royal 86), M Solomon 7 (I Perisic 68), S Heung-min 9 (Richarlison 72), D Kulusevski 7 (O Skipp 86). **Booked** Sarr, Kulusevski, Hojberg. **Referee** D England. **Attendance** 21,750.

Getafe fans happy with Greenwood

Simon Hunter Madrid

Despite the huge amount of publicity that preceded Mason Greenwood's arrival in Spain, fans of his new club Getafe were generally more interested in his sporting qualities than the controversy surrounding his departure from Manchester United.

Greenwood has not played for United since January 2022, after an online post that suggested he had assaulted a woman and which led to charges of attempted rape, controlling and coercive behaviour and assault occasioning actual bodily harm. He has always denied the charges, which were dropped in February by the Crown Prosecution Service after it concluded there was "no longer a realistic prospect of conviction". New evidence came to light and witnesses also withdrew their cooperation.

United announced last week that the 21-year-old, right, would leave the club by mutual agreement and his loan to Getafe came late on Friday night only minutes before the transfer window closed.

Getafe, who are located in the south of the Madrid region, visited Real Madrid yesterday in La Liga. Outside the Santiago Bernabéu stadium, Getafe fan Emi Álvarez, 50, questioned the move. She admitted that her "heart was split in two" and said: "I think that one thing has nothing to do with the other. If he has behaved improperly, he should be punished. But if he can play football..."

Other fans seemed more clearly in favour of Greenwood's arrival. "I believe that the signing is going to be controversial and there will be a lot to talk about," Gustavo Gutiérrez, 40, said. "But there are no doubts about his quality as a player. We hope that his image doesn't have an effect on the club and that he can bring joy to Getafe from a footballing point of view, as that's what he's here for."

Alberto Garrido, 15, agreed. "He's a great player, and he has had some problems outside of the sport, but in the end Getafe should welcome any

good player with open arms," he said. "All of the other issues are unrelated to the sport. We are just focusing on him being a great player and he can bring a lot to the team. I'm very happy."

However the Getafe fans who spoke to The Sunday Times did agree that the timing of Greenwood's signing was unfortunate, given the sexism row swirling around the president of Spain's football federation, Luis Rubiales, who is still refusing to quit despite mounting pressure over the kiss he gave the Spanish player Jenni Hermoso after the Women's World Cup final – a kiss that she insists was not consensual.

"From a social point of view, it's a complicated moment,"

Gutiérrez said, with all the Getafe fans agreeing that Rubiales should go.

"Someone in his position cannot behave that way," David Pedraza, 31, said. "It's a very bad time to bring Greenwood to the club given the Rubiales issue, but we have to hope it won't affect Getafe."

Spain's prime minister, Pedro Sanchez, was again critical of Rubiales yesterday, saying that the country's women footballers "gave the world a lesson" by going on strike because Rubiales had failed to resign. "Our players have won twice: first on the pitch, and now in giving a lesson to the world, a lesson of equality between men and women," he said.

Greenwood did not play yesterday but is expected to make his debut on September 17 against Osasuna. Getafe has reportedly not paid a fee for the season-long loan and will only be making a minor contribution to Greenwood's £75,000 weekly wage.

Getafe took the lead in yesterday's match but Real Madrid won the game 2-1, with the winning goal coming from the England midfielder Jude Bellingham five minutes into additional time, his fifth goal in four games for his new side. It was the first match at Madrid's remodelled stadium under a roof, which was used because of rain.



Bellingham celebrates his late winner under the roof of the Bernabéu

Football Premier League



Brighton & Hove Albion
Ferguson 27, 65, 70

Newcastle United
Wilson 90+2

Paul Rowan

Ferguson became the fourth 18-year-old to score a Premier League hat-trick as Brighton & Hove Albion took Newcastle United apart, with Eddie Howe's side registering an unwanted treble of their own – a third successive defeat. Ferguson, signed 2½ years ago from the Dublin side Bohemians for next to nothing, capped nearly a year of steady progress under Roberto De Zerbi by taking home the match ball, having only recently secured his driving licence.

Ferguson's first-half goal punctured Newcastle's bright start and Howe's side looked well beaten after the teenager struck twice in the second half, both goals coming from outside the box. Only Robbie Fowler, Michael Owen and the late Chris Bart-Williams had scored hat-tricks at such a young age in the Premier League before him. A late goal from the substitute Callum Wilson could not disguise the fact that Newcastle have hit a mini-slump, with a number of their key players underperforming.

"Evan can become one of the best goalscorers in Europe," De Zerbi, the Brighton head coach, said. "He is 18 and he is working to complete his qualities. Not just scoring. He can become big, big, big. I don't know how many young players there are like Evan who score these goals in their career."

The result could have been very different had Alexander Isak taken one of two great opportunities in the first five minutes. Firstly, Lewis Dunk misjudged a Bruno Guimarães through-ball early, but his central defensive partner, Jan Paul van Hecke, got him out of jail with a sliding tackle which pressurised Isak into shooting wide.

Brighton have new superstar in Ferguson



Star man Evan Ferguson (Brighton). **Subs:** Brighton T Lamptey (for Pedro 77min), M Dahoud (for Gilmour 77), A Lallana (for March 81), J Milner (for Ferguson 81). **Subs booked** Dahoud, Lallana, Lamptey, Milner. **Newcastle** C Wilson (for Joelinton 58), E Anderson (for Almiron 58), S Longstaff (for Tonali 58), H Barnes (for Isak 74), J Lascelles (for M Targett 74). **Referee** S Attwell. **Attendance** 31,620.

Isak had an even better opportunity moments later when Pervis Estupiñán gave the ball away, but he blazed wide after Sandro Tonali had teed him up.

It was a furious start to the game but gradually Brighton found their footing and threatened the Newcastle goal with efforts from Solly March and

Premier League

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man City	4	4	0	0	11	2	12
Tottenham	4	3	1	0	11	4	10
West Ham	4	3	1	0	9	4	10
Brighton	4	3	0	1	12	6	9
Liverpool	3	2	1	0	6	3	7
Arsenal	3	2	1	0	5	3	7
Brentford	4	1	3	0	8	5	6
Aston Villa	3	2	0	1	8	6	6
Nottm Forest	4	2	0	2	6	6	6
Man Utd	3	2	0	1	4	4	6
Chelsea	4	1	1	2	5	5	4
Crystal Palace	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Fulham	4	1	1	2	4	10	4
Newcastle	4	1	0	3	7	7	3
Wolves	3	1	0	2	2	5	3
Bournemouth	4	0	2	2	4	8	2
Sheff Utd	4	0	1	3	4	7	1
Everton	4	0	1	3	2	8	1
Luton	3	0	0	3	2	9	0
Burnley	3	0	0	3	3	11	0

João Pedro, while Ferguson was denied by Nick Pope at his near post.

Pope's uncertainty with the ball at his feet would be Newcastle's undoing moments later, however, when he cleared straight to the feet of Estupiñán, who cleverly played Kaoru Mitoma through. Pope saved his effort well but made another error when he could only parry Billy Gilmour's subsequent strike and Ferguson took advantage to score from the rebound.

Howe had plenty of work to do at half-time to inspire a Newcastle come-



back, but it was Brighton who came out with their tails even further up. Kieran Trippier gave the ball away in his own box with Newcastle looking increasingly rattled at the waves of Brighton attacks, but at least the full back recovered to clear the ball.

Otherwise, Newcastle looked like a spent force and Brighton and

Ferguson, in particular, were quick to punish them. In the 65th minute he got his second. Gilmour once more glided into a pocket of space and played a smart ball through to the Irishman. He had time to take a couple of touches and then curled a low effort from 25 yards past Pope.

Newcastle missed a chance to get back in the game when Anthony Gordon shot wide and Ferguson got his hat-trick in the 70th minute when Mitoma again found him in plenty of space. This time his shot went into the net with a deflection off Fabian Schär, who had rather lazily raised a leg to try to keep the effort out. Ferguson

-£74m
Brighton's net spend in the transfer window. Newcastle's was £93m

THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

sky sports

Vs

Today 4pm

Complete Offer: £22 extra a month with a new 18-month contract (then standard price applies £27pm for Q customers, £25 for Stream/Glass customers thereafter). 31 days' notice to cancel. New 18-month minimum terms for your Sky TV subscription required. Offer ends 25 September 2023. New 18-month min. terms. Prices may change during this period. General: Non-standard set-up may cost extra. Weekend set-up costs £15 extra. Sky Q customers: Connect to TV using HDMI cable.

JAMES MARSH/SHUTTERSTOCK



Ferguson gets his third and becomes the fourth youngest player to score a Premier League hat-trick

was withdrawn for the final ten minutes to a huge ovation from the Brighton fans who probably realise that they have another £100 million player on their books.

Newcastle have now lost to Manchester City, Liverpool and Brighton after hammering Aston Villa. "It's a tough result for us. It could have been different, but we didn't take our chances," Howe said. "We have lost three games in a row but the fixture list has been very tough. My job is to stay calm and keep our confidence levels up, because we are a very good team. The power is in our hands to change it and that is what we plan to do."

Alyson Rudd



Mikel Arteta's tactical tinkering has left Arsenal looking a shadow of the impressive challengers of last season

The game of the weekend, taking up the late Sunday afternoon slot on Sky Sports, is the visit of Manchester United to the Emirates. I am not so sure Mikel Arteta sees it that way. There is a hurried breathlessness to Arsenal right now. Watching them it is like when you bump into an old friend in the street and upon asking how's life they simply mutter, 'Yes, yes, all good,' without breaking stride.

Must have a train to catch, you think, feeling miffed all the same.

Arteta seems to be hurtling towards October 8 when his side host Manchester City. If he can defeat Pep Guardiola's team then he has a chance to challenge for the title. It is his version of Christmas Day. Never mind the birthday parties in between, all that matters is the big present wrapped in a red velvet bow under the tree.

To a degree it is understandable. Arsenal's two defeats against City last season were defining and when Guardiola's men won 3-1 at the Emirates in February they overtook their rivals to lead the table. That was the moment the external doubts really set in. City won when it mattered while Arsenal succumbed to individual errors, and everyone assumed they lacked the character to take the crown.

Guardiola will not, though, be overly worried about this present version of Arsenal. They lack the imperiousness needed for the trophy. Leicester City managed to win the league with sheer ebullience but mostly a club requires calm superiority and Arsenal have already dropped two points at home to a Fulham side that were in some disarray.

After being pipped to the title in 2019, Liverpool opted to devour all the positives from that campaign and played the next one with an almost entitled sense of destiny. They defeated City at Anfield in the November and never looked back. Most observers believed Jürgen Klopp's side had the air of champions elect and indeed, so comfortably did they seal their first title in 30 years, when they lost 4-0 at the Etihad after a guard of honour no one really cared.

This ought to be the type of model that Arteta follows. There was so much to commend Arsenal last season and yet the 41-year-old is intent on extensive alterations. The patterns of play have changed. It may sound simple to switch from playing from the back into midfield to moving the ball out wide from defence, but it gives his team much to think about. The upshot is that players alter position too often and elegance is lost. Occasionally, so far this season, Arsenal have looked stylistically unattractive.

When you come close to winning the title, is that the right time to start a big experiment? Arteta's

recruitment of Kai Havertz this summer was sufficiently perplexing without him opting to try to redefine the German's role. I am not sure there are two players more dissimilar than Havertz and Granit Xhaka and yet Arteta appears to expect the former Chelsea forward to fill the hole in midfield left by the Swiss international's departure in July. So far, the trial is not working.

Another reason for keeping it simple is Arsenal's participation in the Champions League. Last season the club's exit from the Europa League was regarded as a blessing in disguise. It meant they could focus all their attention on the Premier League. However, it is another thing entirely to treat the elite level of competition as a mere distraction, especially as it is six years since they qualified for it. Arsenal have been drawn against Sevilla, PSV Eindhoven and Lens. It is a group that they should navigate smoothly, as long as they treat it with respect, but the two games against Sevilla, kings of the Europa League, will pose a strong test.

United are in a much tougher group, which Bayern Munich should win, and Erik ten Hag's team will arrive at the Emirates in shaky form. Indeed, all points gained so far this season have felt fortunate but that also speaks of a resilience that could see them outplayed by Arsenal while still posing a threat on the break. Even after dominating against Nottingham Forest, Arteta's side suffered a shaky finale.

Arsenal are behaving, oddly, as though giant leaps are needed to ensure they are ready for October's date with destiny; but perhaps only small steps are required.

“

Guardiola will not be overly worried about this Arsenal. They lack imperiousness needed for the title



Italian Grand Prix
Today 2pm



US Open
Showing live

SPECIAL OFFER
ALL SPORTS
FOR
£22
EXTRA A MONTH FOR 18 MONTHS

Football

Jonathan Northcroft

FOOTBALL CORRESPONDENT



It was late November 2016, a chilly evening at the Allianz Arena, with Bayern Munich easing to yet another Bundesliga win. More interesting than the actual game was an individual involved. He played as a right-sided attacking midfielder for Bayer Leverkusen, Bayern's opposition.

He was willowy, beautifully balanced and moved with a dancer's light-toed grace. His touch was lovely, his decision-making flawless. Such was his level of game understanding, it was almost as if he had played the very same match in a previous life.

Somehow, he was only 17 and making his first ever away start. You left sure – as sure as you ever can be about these things – that you'd just glimpsed greatness in the making.

The player was Kai Havertz and I was there and wrote a gushing tweet about him. I mention all this as a way of saying to Mikel Arteta: it's OK, I understand. I know why you did it. Know why you personally drove through his transfer. Know why you risked empowering a rival – and right at the start of the window, giving them scope to reinvest – by insisting Arsenal gave Chelsea £65 million for this player. I do hope Havertz proves you, and all of us who have ever fallen for this footballer, right. But I have to say, I'm not sure he will.

It has taken only 236 Premier League minutes of Havertz in an Arsenal shirt for Arteta to have to mount a defence of his signing, and he did it with passion and eloquence on Friday, imploring supporters to "give [Havertz] love and we'll get the best out of him".

This came after the grumbling at the Emirates that soundtracked Havertz's involvements in last week's 2-2 draw with Fulham. Not that there were too many involvements: substituted early in the second half, Havertz had the fewest touches (22) of any out-field Arsenal player in the first.

Arteta spoke of Havertz's "phenomenal football brain", his dazzling performances in training and the underlying numbers that suggest his contribution will be special once he finds that moment of spark to ignite his Arsenal career.

He's not the first manager forced to justify faith in this young German enigma. Frank Lampard, who bought Havertz for a then club record £72 million in 2020, found himself pleading for patience when Havertz's Chelsea career was just ten league games old. Thomas Tuchel produced quite the speech on Havertz's behalf in his first press conference as Chelsea manager, although he did have a message for the player that seems relevant – that he should not only "rely on his endless talent".

The trouble is that, even now, even aged 24 and into his eighth senior season, Havertz remains a better footballer on paper than on the pitch. The numbers those Emirates grumblers could quote back at Arteta are the ones that measure obvious output. This season, for Havertz, it's zero goals, zero assists, zero shots on target, zero passes leading to a shot.

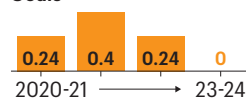


ON TV TODAY

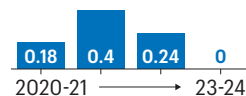
Arsenal v Man United
4pm Sky Sports Main Event. Kick-off 4.30pm

HAVERTZ IN THE PREMIER LEAGUE

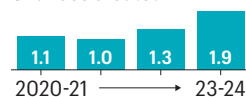
Goals



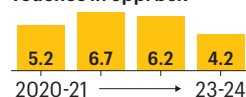
Assists



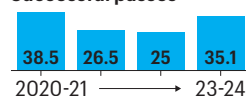
Chances created



Touches in opp. box



Successful passes



All stats per 90. Source: Stats Perform

Going into the current round of games, Havertz was joint 117th for touches in the 2023-24 Premier League, and 109th for completed passes, just above the Chelsea 'keeper, Robert Sánchez. To doubters he's a myth, a mirage.

Arteta looked past three anticlimactic seasons at Chelsea to the Leverkusen Havertz, the prodigy Lothar Matthäus tipped to win a Ballon d'Or, who Rudi Völler dubbed Leverkusen's best ever product and a "mix between Mesut Özil and Michael Ballack". That player produced 38 goals and 16 assists from 2018-20 operating mostly as an attacking midfielder, attracting interest from Liverpool, both Manchester clubs, Bayern and Real Madrid.

Havertz chose Chelsea because so many key people there – including Roman Abramovich – gave him the message that he was a player to build the club's future around and with Lampard he could learn from a giant of goal-scoring attacking midfield play.

The drift began with a quiet start, then a Covid absence and rush of price-tag pressure as he became a symbol of Lampard's failing reign. Havertz admitted that scoring the winner in the Champions League final stopped his first Chelsea season being a "disaster". His second was more productive, but not a lot more.

His third, for such an artistic player, became so artisan as, playing centre forward in a 3-4-2-1 for an embattled, toothless team, he shouldered a physical burden, winning headers, contesting tackles and pressing opponents. The goal touch went (he was statistically the Premier League's worst finisher).

But even amid 2023-24's toils there is something to like. It is Havertz's sacrifice, flexibility, capacity to plug away in a position not his favourite.

Can Kai prove the doubters wrong?



“

Arteta feels Havertz will be like Odegaard at Arsenal, who rediscovered himself spectacularly

Arteta has been looking for the right left-sided No8 since taking over in 2019 and has always wanted that player to be attack-focused, adept at arriving in the box on to cutbacks, and good at combining and swapping places with players around him. And good against the ball.

The tweak in Arsenal's style that he is attempting, in the hope of finding more solutions against defensive blocks, involves more rotations, better midfield possession and more goals from across the pitch.

Havertz has the skill set for all this and in his Leverkusen days showed a special knack for creating chances with clever short passes.

Arteta feels that Havertz will be like Martin Odegaard, who was also a former teen prodigy whose trajectory dipped, but who, once exposed to the culture and coaching Arteta provides – and the “love” of Arsenal fans – rediscovered himself in a spectacular way.

He makes the valid point that Havertz simply hasn't had time to establish the relationships with teammates through which a player with his intuition for moving effectively, according to others' positioning, thrives. He has been thrust in to the side of the field – the left – where Arsenal are in flux.

He's had three different left backs behind him in three games and Declan Rice, who Arteta is encouraging to push into an attacking midfield-left channel, is also finding his way. And, outside him, Gabriel Martinelli is slightly off form.

Those who describe Havertz as “lazy” or “languid” are very wrong. He works and tries hard. But does he do so with intensity? With assertive edge?

The past player he seems most similar to is Juan Sebastián Verón. What a signing Manchester United appeared to have made in 2001 when the Argentinian came to England.

How right Sir Alex Ferguson was to defend his talent – even if his language in his rant at journalists (“He's a f***ing great player! Youse are f***ing idiots!”) was a little route one.

But in the end Fergie offloaded him to Chelsea. It didn't work out differently for the player there either.

“Verón was capable of exceptional football and was talented,” Ferguson would admit. “But, at times, he found the Premiership a bit difficult.”

• I share Arteta's hope that Havertz avoids those words ending up on his football gravestone too – but am just not sure he will.

PARTEY OUT AFTER 'TRAINING INJURY'

Thomas Partey, the Arsenal midfielder who has been deployed as a right back for the opening three Premier League matches of this season, is set to miss today's game against Manchester United at the Emirates Stadium. The Ghana Football Association said last night that he had been left out of their squad for their upcoming internationals because of a groin injury he suffered during training with Arsenal on Thursday, adding that the 30-year-old “could be on the sidelines for a while”.

'I saw Uefa sexism – silence over Rubiales is no surprise'

Jonathan Northcroft

As Sarina Wiegman dedicated her coach of the year award to the Spanish women's team at Uefa's gala evening in Monaco, behind her stood Aleksander Ceferin, looking like a *Thunderbirds* puppet – stiff, blank-eyed, a wooden grin.

Uefa's president kept an uncomfortable silence, as he and his organisation have almost entirely done throughout the Luis Rubiales saga. It's a fortnight since Rubiales appeared to forcibly kiss the midfielder, Jenni Hermoso, as Spain were being presented with winners' medals at the Women's World Cup. Ceferin has said that Rubiales' actions were “inappropriate” but little else.

In fact, the leaders of the European game have spoken out more, in recent days, about how referees calculate stoppage time than about a scandal centring on the rights of women.

Rubiales? He remains a Uefa vice-president, although pay in his lucrative €250,000 position has been paused pending a Fifa investigation. He is still in the boys' club. Still the face of the Uefa-backed Spain-Portugal-Morocco-Ukraine 2030 World Cup bid, while he clings to power in his domestic post. “I am annoyed by Uefa's silence,” Sally Freedman says. “But I am certainly not surprised.”

Freedman, formerly a senior communications manager with Uefa, is the author of a book documenting her experiences of sexism and harassment during a life involved in the game. It's called *Get Your Tits Out for the Lads* and in light of recent scandals – of which Rubiales is only one – it is vital reading.

Freedman spent almost four years with Uefa, during which she was confronted by a range of outdated behaviours and thinking. These included female staff working at Euro 2020 being offered a choice of uniform that involved wearing either jeans or – no kidding – transparent trousers. When she took the jeans option, a “very senior manager” suggested she come in the next day wearing the trousers so he could “check” they really were see-through.

Then there was the marketing material that Uefa came up with to drum up hospitality ticket sales for that tournament in the Far East. It involved pictures of young women in crop tops and miniskirts. And there was last year's Christmas party. “I had left by then [Freedman quit in July 2022] but I asked a colleague how the party was and she told me there were girls half-naked, on stilts. Their only purpose was to strut up and down and have photos in Santa's grotto.

“Somebody thought that was a good idea. Despite every week there being a story about sexism – whether in business, in politics, in sport – somehow senior decision-makers didn't see anything wrong,” she says. “It's shocking – but not shocking, if you know what I mean.

“And what did [the marketing material] say to women? That we're pieces of meat and they're just using us to make money. We've seen in the



SEBASTIEN MORET/FAIRPLAY PUBLISHING

Freedman's book covers some of her experiences at “tone deaf” Uefa



Freedman made contact with Jonathan Northcroft after reading this report a week ago

Tour de France, with the [scantly clad] girls who used to be on the podium, that's been stopped. Formula One used to have girls sprawled over the cars and that's been stopped. But at Uefa they're still doing it to promote hospitality sales. It's like they're tone deaf.”

Freedman did try to effect change. “There are many good people [at Uefa]. I initiated a gender and equality working group that was supported by the chief of human resources. Unfortunately, the majority of members were women, but the idea was well received.

“I wrote emails. I talked to people. But an individual staff member in a diversity and inclusion role – who I was able to take complaints to – has zero powers. They did their best to

“

I asked a colleague how the party was and she told me there were half-naked girls

talk to those at executive level but I'd get emails back saying, “Thanks Sally ...” but never any change.

“I give the example in the book of, during the pandemic, being issued with a Teams background where all the people in it were male. I said, ‘Fifty per cent of the population are women and we're supposed to be promoting equality’ and it was, ‘Great point, Sally’. But three months later there were eight new backgrounds, all featuring men.

“That's something tiny but not if you care about equality. Every meeting room at Uefa is named after a man. In the reception, it's the history of football. Are any women featured? Of course not. It's here's Ronaldo, here's Beckham. You think if they're not going to do the little things they're certainly not going to tackle the big things.

“My phone has gone more crazy over Rubiales than [it did over the European] Super League when I was at Uefa as it was happening. Even non-football people are messaging: ‘Uefa's silence is deafening, why is he still vice-president, Sally?’”

Other experiences include sexual harassment from men on multiple occasions when attending games as a fan (the title of Freedman's book is taken from one such incident), being issued with men's kit to play in staff football tournaments, and a particularly unpleasant moment working for Melbourne City FC when, while escorting a player to the stage at a supporters' function the footballer whispered in her ear, “My cock is f***ing massive and wouldn't you like to see it.”

She says, with sadness, “My book only contains a few things I encountered – if I put them all in, it could be an encyclopedia. The problems women face in football go beyond being with one individual or one organisation. Just as in society, they're systemic.

“All these stories people warned me about at the beginning of my football career, I naively thought, I'll be fine.

“But, as I say in my book, everyone was right – and I was very wrong.”

Ferrari rise to the challenge

Alasdair Reid Monza

Things haven't exactly gone Ferrari's way throughout a Formula One season blighted by mishaps, strategy errors and early retirements, but to the delight of their adoring "Tifosi" they came good in spectacular fashion in qualifying for their home grand prix as Carlos Sainz grabbed pole position and Charles Leclerc came in third.

At one point, in fact, the men in red had a front-row lockout. Then, dramatically, in the dying seconds of the session, Max Verstappen claimed prime position with a blistering lap of just over 1min 20sec. But the Ferrari fans' disappointment turned to tumultuous joy moments later when Sainz flashed over the line to beat the world champion's mark by 0.013sec.

Sainz has long been seen as the weaker of the two Ferrari drivers. In nine seasons he has claimed only one win – last year's British Grand Prix – and this was only his fourth pole position. Leclerc, by contrast, has five wins and 20 poles on his CV and has generally been viewed as the hotter property when driver moves are in the air. Yet Sainz now has the better chance to stop the Verstappen bandwagon by denying the Dutchman a record ten successive race wins.

The outcome was actually in doubt for a few minutes after the chequered flag. At the start of qualifying both Ferrari drivers had gone too slowly on their preparation laps, in contravention of the race director's orders, and it was confirmed their actions would be investigated after the session.

To the relief of the two drivers, and the red-clad hordes in the stands, it was announced that no penalties



Sainz, right, celebrates taking pole position with Leclerc at Monza, the home grand prix for Ferrari

would be imposed as it was recognised that they would have impeded other drivers had they tried to follow the directive.

As happy as he was with his achievement, Sainz admitted that racing against what is arguably the most dominant car in F1 history will be no easy task.

"We've got the motivation and the energy to do it," the Spaniard said. "The car has been very good all weekend, especially over one lap. But from what I've seen through the long runs, I'm not going to lie, racing is not the same as qualifying."

"With Red Bull, as soon as you put five or six laps on the tyres and everything starts to degrade a bit, that's where [they show] their strengths and the race pace we've seen all year. It is a good opportunity tomorrow but being realistic, the Red Bull should be quicker, but we are going to try and make their life as difficult as possible."

"Nothing is impossible, especially starting from pole. If I get a good start I'm going to do everything I can to stay ahead of Max. Looking back at their year, at all the races they have clearly been quicker, so that makes me feel it's not going to be easy at all."

For most of the session it seemed that Verstappen's team-mate, Sergio Pérez, would allow Red Bull and Ferrari to fill the front two rows of the grid. But a late blast by George Russell

Grid for Italian Grand Prix

Driver	Team	Time
1 Carlos Sainz Jr (Sp)	Ferrari	1:20.294
2 Max Verstappen (Neth)	Red Bull	1:20.307
3 Charles Leclerc (Mon)	Ferrari	1:20.361
4 George Russell (GB)	Mercedes	1:20.671
5 Sergio Pérez (Mex)	Red Bull	1:20.688
6 Alexander Albon (Thai)	Williams	1:20.760
7 Oscar Piastri (Aus)	McLaren	1:20.785
8 Lewis Hamilton (GB)	Mercedes	1:20.820
9 Lando Norris (GB)	McLaren	1:20.979
10 Fernando Alonso (Sp)	Aston Martin	1:21.417
11 Yuki Tsunoda (Japan)	AlphaTauri	1:21.594
12 Liam Lawson (NZ)	AlphaTauri	1:21.758
13 Nico Hülkenberg (Ger)	Haas	1:21.776
14 Valtteri Bottas (Fin)	Alfa Romeo	1:21.940
15 Logan Sargeant (US)	Williams	1:21.944
16 Guanyu Zhou (China)	Alfa Romeo	1:22.390
17 Pierre Gasly (Fr)	Alpine	1:22.545
18 Esteban Ocon (Fr)	Alpine	1:22.548
19 Kevin Magnussen (Den)	Haas	1:22.592
20 Lance Stroll (Can)	Aston Martin	1:22.860

Championship standings

Driver	Pts
1 Max Verstappen (Neth)	339
2 Sergio Pérez (Mex)	201
3 Fernando Alonso (Sp)	168
4 Lewis Hamilton (GB)	156
Constructor	
1 Red Bull	540
2 Mercedes	255
3 Aston Martin	215



A late blast by Russell allowed him to claim fourth place for Mercedes

allowed the English driver to claim fourth place for Mercedes. Russell said later that the "Alternative Tyre Allocation" protocol (which obliges drivers to use all three compounds across the three qualifying sessions) had worked well for them this time.

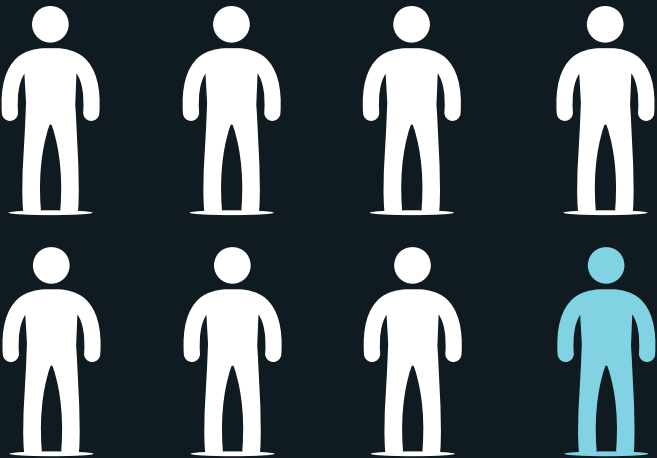
Russell said: "You need to be dynamic in this new qualifying format as you jump down the tyre compounds and I think we did a good job managing it today. The engineers did a great job overnight and we hit the ground running this morning; I felt more comfortable in the car."

"With the softer tyre compounds Pirelli have brought here, I think there's the option to tune the set-up more aggressively for qualifying or favouring the race pace a little bit more. We've done the latter, so I hope it pays off."

Lewis Hamilton got caught up in traffic and could do no better than eighth, where he provides the filling in a McLaren sandwich of seventh-placed Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris in ninth. Hamilton explained that he had struggled to find his car's "sweet spot" and suggested that gaining places in the race itself could be challenging.

"We know how close the times are in qualifying and that also translates to very similar race pace," Hamilton said. "That can make it hard to make up positions through the field, especially early in the race. George did a great job today to get on the second row, so I hope I can make progress forwards tomorrow."

1 IN 8 MEN WILL GET PROSTATE CANCER



Don't wait for symptoms.



Check your risk in 30 seconds and find out what you can do about it.

prostatecanceruk.org/risk



PROSTATE CANCER UK

Prostate Cancer UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1005541) and in Scotland (SC039332). Registered company number 02653887.

Race fans pose with placards, including of Fernando Alonso, centre, and Sainz, right



RUGBY WORLD CUP 2023

**EIGHT-PAGE
PREVIEW
SPECIAL**

CAMERON SPENCER/GETTY IMAGES



Siya Kolisi and his side celebrate winning the 2019 World Cup, the country's third global title

Just for now, let us take an antidote for rugby's current pain. For now, in the dazzling light of the approach of the tenth World Cup, all we need to do is to look at the fixtures. They are sensational. It could and should turn out as the greatest tournament of the ten, as a rugby spectacular.

There was going to be a kind of perfection, almost a purity, about Friday's match, the thunderous collision between France and New Zealand in the Stade de France, the stadium which for the initiated bears a stunning resemblance to the mothership in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

Indeed, the classic shape of the opener between the two giants is such that you feel anger that the great French centre, the charging Jonathan Danty, has hurt a hamstring and may be unfit – it is as though one withdrawal has somehow dented the flat-out perfection of the whole thing.

Who knows, the absence of Danty, only one change from the 46 participants on the field and on the benches, may decide the match. But what a match, and what an atmosphere.

The standards at the peak of the sport have never been so high – South Africa, Ireland, New Zealand and France can all win the tournament, and the crushing anomaly of the premature draw made back in the mists of time, which means that one of South Africa, Ireland, New Zealand and France cannot make the semi-finals, seems ever more shocking.

But the battles will be magnificent and there is a bristling undercard. Scotland are a longer shot to qualify but growing in strength and led by the marvellous, piratical Finn Russell. There are the first genuine signs, too, that Australia and Wales, not in con-

More than a trophy on the line

Stephen Jones
THE VOICE OF RUGBY



“

The standards at the peak have never been so high. Battles will be magnificent

ON TV FRIDAY

France v New Zealand
6.45pm ITV1, Kick-off 8.15pm

tention to win the tournament, have improved in their camps from a low base. They could both be competitive, and maybe Eddie Jones's gibberish may help (for a change).

From the South Seas, Tonga and Samoa are reinforced by the returnees under the Homeland Law (to be precise, those players sneaked away by major unions, who offered them huge contracts but also voted to grant the smaller nations derisory funding).

Then you have Fiji. Last week, the most fêted man in rugby, even among those who did not know his name, was surely the backs coach of Fiji, the man pulling the strings of those magnificent, lithe attackers who put England away last weekend.

Luckily, some of us encountered

the string-puller in Glen Jackson, formerly a referee, on Thursday. You sensed that he does not believe that Fiji's form against England was in any way a freak or in any way a peak. Some of us, were we in control of rugby fate, would regard a Fijian World Cup win as the summit of everything we have ever loved in sport and definitive proof of the existence of the Almighty.

But consider also the machine-gun burst of the opening weekend alone. On Friday, France and New Zealand; then, half the world, it seems, will be gathering for the TGV down to Marseille for England v Argentina; on all present form England would be narrow second favourites, but their followers will hope that the understated love for the sport and for the national team will come to the fore, and conspire with the game heads of the England players to produce something, so far, undetected.

And then next day, one of the key encounters in the Pool of Hell when Scotland take on South Africa. To watch South Africa last Friday at Twickenham in their blasting disposal of New Zealand would cause a shudder among many teams. But Scotland are improved, show no signs of caving and every sign of resisting until the last acts. Then on Sunday evening, to complete the wild weekend? Wales meet Fiji. What is Welsh for gulp?

Of course there is a downside on the field. You fear for Romania, a great rugby nation in decline, in a ghastly pool. So too for the largely amateur Namibians, in with France and New Zealand; and for the tyros of Portugal and Chile. We pray that the difference in size, power and endurance fitness will not cause injury.

Rugby needs that start and it needs the momentum to be retained. You encounter everywhere those who

WORLD CUP WINS

New Zealand 1987, 2011, 2015	3			
South Africa 1995, 2007, 2019	3			
Australia 1991, 1999	2			
England 2003	1			

have lost patience – and they are in heavy numbers – with aspects of rugby on and off the field.

There is the storm of box-kicks, the laws ignored, the patter of endless mini-rucks, the stoppages of play; there is too, the monumental importance of the regulations on safety at the tackle, the knowledge that not only could they wreck matches with red cards, but fail to prevent injury.

There will be countless followers, surely, giving it one more chance, scratching their heads, returning to the television and returning, in body or in mind, to the stadiums of France.

Everyone knows that this Rugby World Cup comes with strings. The end of it in late October must be marked by a bonfire of age-old admin vanities and its self-serving and plodding leaders, from World Rugby to Twickenham – when did anyone last hear anything from the RFU chairman, or his board? – to all points of rugby's compass.

No more reviews, inquiries or commissions. Rugby must become a free-for-all, one nation one vote, with commissioners running competitions and leagues, replacing block voting bores.

Right. Let's come back to that with a vengeance in late October. And give ourselves up to a sport that can still be one of life's glorious distractions.

RUGBY WORLD CUP 2023

This team needs some honesty – and the old Itoje

Lawrence Dallaglio

2003 WORLD CUP WINNER



Early exit in prospect if England's senior players don't start telling it how it is and confronting their issues

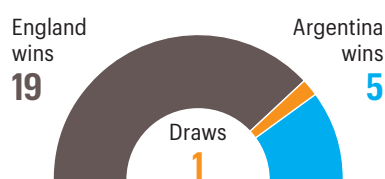
If you're looking for reasons to be cheerful then it's probably best to stop reading now. The decline of England since that superlative World Cup semi-final performance against New Zealand in Yokohama four years ago has veered between steady and steep and reached its nadir at Twickenham last Saturday. Even one of the few bright spots in that period – the series win in Australia just over a year ago – has now been put in perspective by the Wallabies' dismal displays since then.

The RFU were right to axe Eddie Jones, but probably did it too late. Since succeeding Jones, Steve Borthwick has said several times, both on and off the record, how shocked he was by the state of the squad he inherited. Physically, tactically and mentally, England weren't at the races. That's perhaps not surprising when you consider that in Eddie's six years

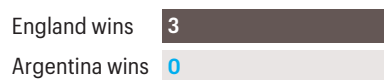
in charge there were, I believe, 23 assistant coaches who came and went.

No one expected an immediate transformation under Borthwick and, knowing him as I do, he wouldn't hide behind the faults of the previous regime. The simple fact is that results in the past year (encompassing both

HEAD-TO-HEAD



World Cup head-to-head



Research: Oliver Harrison

England's pivotal group stage match against Argentina is on the horizon, but the side do not have time to play themselves into form – as happened with Dallaglio and England in 2007. Team selection will be vital next week



SUNDAY, SORTED

HEAR ALL THE BIG STORIES AND DEBATES FROM THE WEEKEND'S FOOTBALL

SUNDAY EDITION

TODAY 9AM-11AM

WITH SHAUN CUSTIS, HEAD OF SUN SPORT AND HENRY WINTER, CHIEF FOOTBALL WRITER FOR THE TIMES

FINAL WORD

TONIGHT 6.30PM-9PM

WITH MAJESTIC AND ALAN PARDEW

BRING IT ON

talkSPORT



ON RADIO ONLINE ON THE APP



CLODAGH KILCOYNE/REUTERS

regimes) have been terrible – four wins (two against mediocre Wales teams and one each against Italy and Japan) and one draw from 13. I have said repeatedly in these pages over the past 18 months that time was running out to catch up with the likes of France, New Zealand, South Africa, Ireland and even Scotland. Last Saturday, time ran out.

Let's just revisit that 22-30 Fiji defeat for a moment. I'll probably be criticised for short-changing the Pacific Islanders but the number of basic, unforced errors made by England that day was embarrassing. Those piled more pressure on the home side which in turn pushed the penalty count against them up into double figures.

With honesty in the review session and application on the training paddock, these things can be fixed overnight. What I found particularly worrying, though, was the general absence of England players coming forward, either in front of the traditional media or on social media, to take ownership of their mistakes.

I'm not asking for the full sackcloth and ashes but I do expect the senior leadership group to publicly acknowledge the inadequacy of performances. Some players don't like doing media, I get that. But too often we just get the usual players put up in front of the camera and their explanations have become glib.

A more honest and open assessment is not only the least the fans deserve but would also help clear the air and accelerate the reset that is so badly needed. The result – because again it's been a recurring theme over the past two years – has been a disconnect with the public and this too was exemplified in the Fiji game. Think about it: this was Courtney Lawes's 100th cap, the send-off game for the team before they departed for France. Twickenham should have been full to the rafters. Instead it was half

ENGLAND AT THE WORLD CUP

		Pool	QF	SF	Final	Winner
1987	Quarter-final					★
1991	Runner-up					★
1995	Semi-final					★
1999	Quarter-final					★
2003	Winner					★
2007	Runner-up					★
2011	Quarter-final					★
2015	Pool					★
2019	Runner-up					★



“
A more open assessment is not only the least the fans deserve but would also clear the air

empty. The contrast with the All Blacks v South Africa game the night before could not have been more stark. In less than 24 hours, the atmosphere went from funfair to funeral.

What I fear we have at the moment is the squad retreating further into itself, becoming more defensive – both on and off the pitch. A siege mentality, us against the world, can be effective but if you keep circling the wagons then you eventually lose sight of where you're trying to get to. Make no mistake,

their pool rivals Argentina, Japan and Samoa are smelling blood. The game against the Pumas on Saturday is huge. Argentina always raise their game for a World Cup and for England in particular. They won the last encounter with them, only ten months ago, and will be aggressive, especially at the breakdown.

With Billy Vunipola missing through suspension, selection for the back row combination will be key. With question marks over the fitness of Tom Curry, I wouldn't be surprised if England go for Ben Earls, Jack Willis and Courtney Lawes at blind side. Lawes' extra bulk at No 6 could be crucial in a physical breakdown battle and he will increase England's lineup options. In Owen Farrell's absence, he will also captain the side and I have always thought it's easier to lead from the pack, and the back in particular, in what is likely to be a tight encounter where positive communication with the referee will be vital.

But he will need support. It's time for George Ford and Maro Itoje to step up as second lieutenants and for a super-charged Itoje to remind us of the qualities that made him the best lock in the world from 2016-19. We have almost forgotten them.

In 2007, the last England team of which I was a part went into a World Cup on the back of some indifferent performances. We scraped past USA in our opener then were beaten 36-0 by South Africa. We did the soul-searching, took responsibility for our failure and stripped everything back. Yet we were lucky – we had games against Samoa and Tonga to start the rebuild before we hit our stride against Australia in the quarter-finals. This England don't have time to work their way into form.

That's why it's impossible to overestimate how significant next Saturday's clash with Argentina is. Win and the lift will be massive. Lose and Japan – whom they meet the following weekend – will feel emboldened. If you feel pessimistic now just think how you will feel then.

ON TV SATURDAY

England v Argentina

7.15pm, ITV1. Kick-off 8pm

EVERY RUGBY WORLD CUP 2023 FIXTURE

POOL A
FRANCE, ITALY, NAMIBIA, NEW ZEALAND, URUGUAY

- Sept 8 France v New Zealand, Paris, 8.15pm
- Sept 9 Italy v Namibia, Saint-Étienne, midday
- Sept 14 France v Uruguay, Lille, 8pm
- Sept 15 New Zealand v Namibia, Toulouse, 8pm
- Sept 20 Italy v Uruguay, Nice, 4.45pm
- Sept 21 France v Namibia, Marseille, 8pm
- Sept 27 Uruguay v Namibia, Lyon, 4.45pm
- Sept 29 New Zealand v Italy, Lyon, 8pm
- Oct 5 New Zealand v Uruguay, Lyon, 8pm
- Oct 6 France v Italy, Lyon, 8pm



POOL B
SOUTH AFRICA, IRELAND, SCOTLAND, TONGA, ROMANIA

- Sept 9 Ireland v Romania, Bordeaux, 2.30pm
- Sept 10 South Africa v Scotland, Marseille, 4.45pm
- Sept 16 Ireland v Tonga, Nantes, 8pm
- Sept 17 South Africa v Romania, Bordeaux, 2pm
- Sept 23 South Africa v Ireland, Paris, 8pm
- Sept 24 Scotland v Tonga, Nice, 4.45pm
- Sept 30 Scotland v Romania, Lille, 8pm
- Oct 1 South Africa v Tonga, Marseille, 8pm
- Oct 7 Ireland v Scotland, Paris, 8pm
- Oct 8 Tonga v Romania, Lille, 4.45pm



POOL C
WALES, AUSTRALIA, FIJI, GEORGIA, PORTUGAL

- Sept 9 Australia v Georgia, Paris, 5pm
- Sept 10 Wales v Fiji, Bordeaux, 8pm
- Sept 16 Wales v Portugal, Nice, 4.45pm
- Sept 17 Australia v Fiji, Saint-Étienne, 4.45pm
- Sept 23 Georgia v Portugal, Toulouse, 1pm
- Sept 24 Wales v Australia, Lyon, 8pm
- Sept 30 Fiji v Georgia, Bordeaux, 4.45pm
- Oct 1 Australia v Portugal, Saint-Étienne, 4.45pm
- Oct 7 Ireland v Scotland, Paris, 8pm
- Oct 8 Tonga v Romania, Lille, 4.45pm

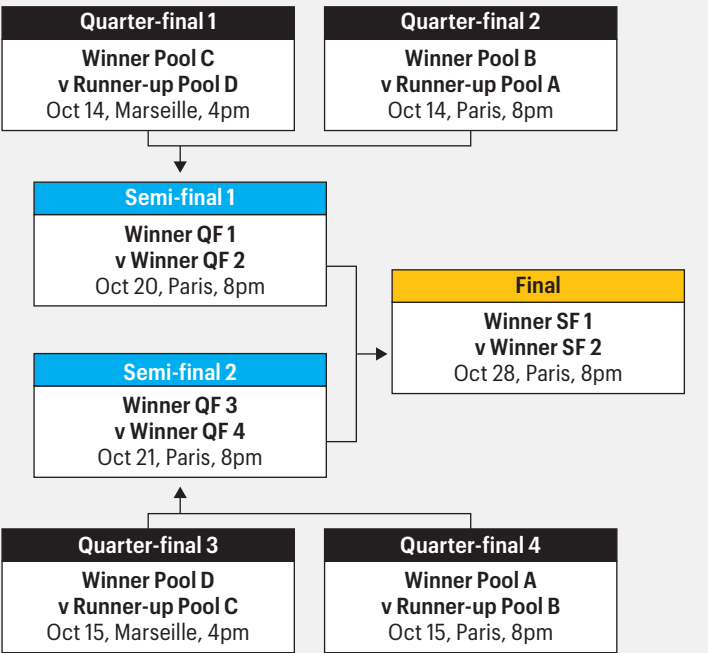


POOL D
ENGLAND, JAPAN, ARGENTINA, SAMOA, CHILE

- Sept 9 England v Argentina, Marseille, 8pm
- Sept 10 Japan v Chile, Toulouse, midday
- Sept 16 Samoa v Chile, Bordeaux, 2pm
- Sept 17 England v Japan, Nice, 8pm
- Sept 22 Argentina v Samoa, Saint-Étienne, 4.45pm
- Sept 23 England v Chile, Lille, 4.45pm
- Sept 28 Japan v Samoa, Toulouse, 8pm
- Sept 30 Argentina v Chile, Nantes, 2pm
- Oct 7 England v Samoa, Lille, 4.45pm
- Oct 8 Japan v Argentina, Nantes, midday



KNOCKOUT STAGE SCHEDULE



All matches are live on ITV

RUGBY WORLD CUP 2023

STUART
BARNES

It takes only a shortish rugby memory to buy into the French panic that greeted the anterior cruciate ligament injury suffered by Romain Ntamack in the World Cup warm-up match against Scotland in Saint-Étienne. That is not to dismiss the sadness, primarily for the France and Toulouse fly half, and his absence from what was potentially the highlight of his career.

There's also a sadness for those who love the artistry of the sport. There's no more elegant a fly half on the planet. Most recently he eased 60 metres through the massed ranks of the La Rochelle defence to win the French Top 14 title for Toulouse in Paris. At the same venue where France host New Zealand on Friday; the same venue from where he mesmerised the watching world as France beat the All Blacks 40-25 in 2021.

Cast your minds back. New Zealand had countered from their own 22. A kick through bobbled in the French in-goal area, three All Blacks in pursuit. A swerve of Ntamack's hip, a subtle change of pace and a swivel left the trio clutching at air. Beauden Barrett is rarely left looking so outclassed. Then the fly half stepped a tantalisingly few millimetres infield to draw another tackler and release Melvyn Jaminet into space. The move finished five metres from the All Black line. The gorgeous touch of genius swung the game back into French hands.

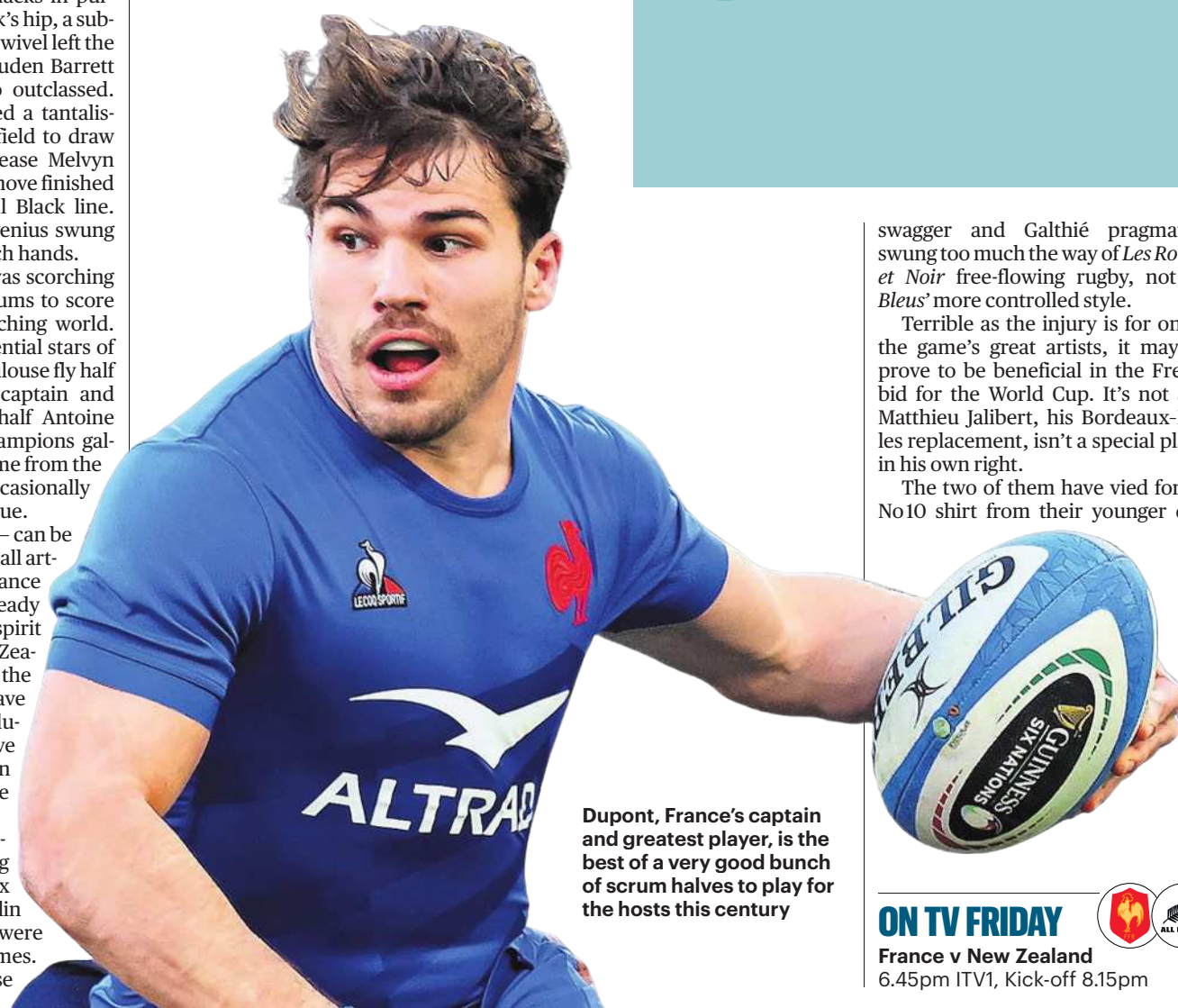
And this autumn he was scorching past defenders from scrums to score tries to remind the watching world. Here was one of the potential stars of the tournament. The Toulouse fly half is the foil to France's captain and greatest player, scrum half Antoine Dupont. The French champions galvanise their attacking game from the fulcrum at half back. Occasionally they are too good to be true.

And that – perversely – can be a problem. Ntamack was all artist in his early days. In France he has been recast as a steady influence. But his spirit screams to attack. New Zealand on the first day of the World Cup? Could he have been that steadying influence? Would France have overplayed their hand on the big night, or in the final?

Fabien Galthié criticised his team for playing too much rugby in the Six Nations defeat in Dublin earlier this year. They were almost too dazzling at times. The balance of Toulouse

France's options at fly half are still good despite the unfortunate injury for Ntamack that will rule the pivot out of the World Cup. Galthié likes to have two players with vision on the field of play

A game of two



Dupont, France's captain and greatest player, is the best of a very good bunch of scrum halves to play for the hosts this century

swagger and Galthié pragmatism swung too much the way of *Les Rouges et Noir* free-flowing rugby, not *Les Bleus*' more controlled style.

Terrible as the injury is for one of the game's great artists, it may yet prove to be beneficial in the French bid for the World Cup. It's not as if Matthieu Jalibert, his Bordeaux-Bègles replacement, isn't a special player in his own right.

The two of them have vied for the No10 shirt from their younger days

until a series of injuries on Jalibert's part enabled the Toulouse man to grab the jersey and make it his. Jalibert could only look on and admire and wait for his chance. Now it has arrived.

Last Sunday he served up a cheery reminder of his qualities to any French fans still in a state of dismay over Ntamack's injury. He played the percentages in the first half against Australia before changing the pace and nature of the match with his rapid running game. He slashed through the Wallaby defence to create the opportunity for Damian Penaud's first try, having just weighted a cross-kick to perfection for Gabin Villière to score on the left wing.

He plays it every bit as flat as Ntamack and, while not gliding like the Toulouse No10, he has a staggering surge of acceleration which caused chaos in the Wallaby defence. Tactically he has a reputation for being slightly selfish but this French squad seem to be melding into the broad structure.

Jalibert could be the best fly half of the tournament. A few offloads, chips and sizzling breaks will leave Ntamack having to fight his way back into the French team after the cruellest of injuries. France are fantastically fortunate

ON TV FRIDAY

France v New Zealand

6.45pm ITV1, Kick-off 8.15pm



THE BIG QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Who will win it?

Stephen Jones: South Africa, now that France appear to be collecting injuries.

Stuart Barnes: Despite South Africa's stunning demolition of New Zealand at Twickenham, I'll stick with France. Their scrum is a worry without Cyril Baille, inset, but the way they changed gears against Australia was stunning. France – as the host nation – will



inspire them and so will Antoine Dupont. Home advantage to prevail with South Africa and Ireland the contenders should they slip.

How will England do?

SJ: Quarter-final losers, brave and improved but hardly sublime. Would love to be proved wrong.

SB: England will not make the semi-final but that remains a target given the lack of quality in this half of

the draw. I don't see where the improvement comes from and right now any of Australia, Fiji and a full strength Wales would beat them. It won't be straightforward to make the last eight.

Player to watch

SJ: Gabin Villière, the incredible French mini-beast and pocket battleship.

SB: Why would you mention anyone

but Dupont? He could be on the threshold of joining the greats. He is in second gear at the moment but still in complete control of France's games. He's possessed of unbelievable variety with that capacity to kick magnificently off either foot. If you want an alternative, look no further than Eben Etzebeth, left – the poster boy for the tight forwards. He's getting better with age.





PIC CREDIT

halves

“

There’s the sadness for those who love artistry – there’s no more elegant a fly half [than Ntamack]

to have two such classy No 10s. France prefer their scrum halves. Dupont is the best of a very good bunch this century. Not so at fly half. Frédéric Michalak was arguably the pick. The golden boy, a brilliant rugby player but a scrum half convert to fly half exposed by Jonny Wilkinson in the 2003 World Cup semi-final.

In the 2011 final against New Zealand in Auckland, France opted for another scrum half – this one not even a convert – to fill the fly half’s boots. Morgan Parra was second choice to Dimitri Yachvili but fly half pick ahead of François Trinh-Duc. With a high-class fly half they might well have won the tournament. But France don’t do fly halves; at least not until now. Antoine Hastoy is a fine cover for Jalibert while Thomas Ramos is a superb full back, although it suits Galthié to have the vision of two fly halves on the field.

On that day in 2011, New Zealand relied on Stephen Donald, who dropped his fishing rod to answer the call, after an epidemic of injured fly halves. History reminds us that he kicked the winning penalty in a 8-7 final. Donald was neither waiting nor expecting his chance. Jalibert, in contrast, is primed and ready.

Man with most to prove...
SJ: Eddie Jones — can he still claim to wield a magic wand or is it just a useless big stick?
SB: Ian Foster, right. New Zealand have won this season’s Rugby Championship by going pretty much flat out.

Teams like South Africa, Ireland and France are plotting World Cup glory while New Zealand look happy to win whatever game comes their way. Italy could trouble them — I



Galthié won’t let France repeat mistakes of 2007

BENJAMIN KAYSER



Former France hooker

My last involvement in the France squad was the 2015 World Cup quarter-final 62-13 defeat by New Zealand. The All Blacks were an outstanding side who would go on to win that tournament but that result underlined more how far behind we were as a rugby nation.

Four years earlier in New Zealand. France reached the final and almost beat the host nation, despite having lost to Tonga in the pool and barely deserving to make the knockout stage. Getting to the final was a curse because it gave us an excuse not to look at our issues and making changes. In French we call it *l’arbre qui cache la forêt* – the tree that hides the forest.

Over the next four years French rugby disappeared down a black hole. The federation and the Top 14 clubs became increasingly polarised, with minimum collaboration. That meant coach Philippe Saint-André had limited control over his players who had to return to club duties in the weeks when France weren’t playing, while ticket sales at the Stade de France began to fall.

By the time of the 2015 World Cup, the lack of trust was pretty clear. Serge Blanco, vice-president of the federation, joined the camp and it felt at times like having the headmaster (Blanco) watching over the teacher (Saint-André) as he gave the lesson.

The preparation was centred on conditioning. During 2½ months of preparation, I think I saw my family for three days at most. The facilities – at the National Rugby HQ in Marcoussis, and at the Vale Resort in Wales during the tournament – were sensational but we were isolated. It was like we could not be trusted to behave. A lack of trust from management does not promote ownership or well-being.

Things have definitely changed for the better. The league and federation are now focused on success for “our” World Cup. The head coach Fabien Galthié’s approach is player-led, embracing everything that comes with being the host nation.

For much of this summer, including during the warm-up matches, France were based in

Soustons in the southwest, at a high-end campsite. Every player had his own lodge, with families allowed to come and go. Only twice a week were the squad required to eat together. Nor was there segregation from other guests. Players mingled among the public, shared breakfast with them. Training took place in front of 3,000 people.

Galthié wants his squad to get used to the pressure of the French nation, to feed off it. It’s no coincidence that Raphael Ibañez, who was captain the last time France hosted a World Cup in 2007, is now team manager. Ibañez has admitted that his side tried to shut themselves off from the weight of expectation but there was no hiding place when they found themselves in a semi-final in Paris against an England team who had been written off. You have to embrace that expectation, was the lesson. So when I get asked if this team are ready, I say they have never been more ready, especially when I also consider how the leadership team has risen to the occasion.

Making Antoine Dupont – the best player in the world – captain in 2021

“

We often talk about a rugby team being a brotherhood but it has real meaning with France

HOW WORLD CUP HOSTS HAVE FARED

1987, Australia	Semi-final			
Pool	QF	SF	Final	Winner
1987, New Zealand	Winner			
1995, South Africa	Winner			
2003, Australia	Runner-up			
2007, France	Semi-final			
2011, New Zealand	Winner			
2015, England	Pool stage			
2019, Japan	Quarter-final			

Matches at 1991 and 1999 tournaments were shared across British Isles and France.
Research: Oliver Harrison

was a risk. He had received every individual recognition – World, Six Nations and European player of the years awards – so why make the spotlight on him even brighter? But did his level of performance diminish? Not a bit. Around him there is a spine of leaders, from Julien Marchand and Cyril Baille in the front row to Grégory Alldritt in the back row and Gaël Fickou and Thomas Ramos in the backs.

We often talk about a rugby team being a brotherhood but that has real meaning with France. Clearly there is a strong bond between the Toulouse players who make up a significant number of the starting XV. But it runs deeper than that. Anthony Jelonch, Dupont, Alldritt and hooker Pierre Bourgarit all come from same grassroots club, Auch, in Le Gers, playing together since the age of eight. Baille, Marchand and Dorian Aldegheri, the Toulouse front row, have scrummed down together since their early teenage years. Most of them would be contenders for a World XV.

Not everything about the preparations has been perfect. Romain Ntamack, who would have started at fly half, has been ruled out of the tournament while centre Jonathan Danty, Baille and lock Paul Willemse, all important players, will not feature in Friday’s opener against the All Blacks.

The loss of Ntamack is a blow but two years ago, Matthieu Jalibert was playing so well that people wondered if Ntamack would dislodge him from the starting XV or be shifted to 12. Galthié picked him for last year’s autumn internationals but it was Jalibert who came off the bench to help France edge out Australia then South Africa in tight matches.

I wouldn’t say the pair are polar opposites but while Ntamack is quiet but super dedicated, like Jonny Wilkinson, Jalibert has a touch of sparkle – like Finn Russell. He was quiet in the first half of the game against Australia last Sunday, as was the whole team, but was brilliant in the second half. The only criticism I would make is that sometimes he overcomplicates things.

New Zealand will be a handful but if France dominate them in the scrum like South Africa did at Twickenham last month the celebrations in the Stade de France won’t be confined to just the opening ceremony.

Benjamin Kayser won 47 caps for France from 2008 to 2015

know, I know — although it is a quarter-final exit which most probably awaits them.

By the end of October, Eddie Jones will have...
SJ: Tried to justify Australia’s performances in around 26 wonderful ways.
SB: Told the world that Australia are in great shape for 2025 and the British & Irish Lions tour. And he may be right.

Phrase you least want to hear?
SJ: “Steve, Stuart Barnes has done a cracking piece on Marcus Smith.”
SB: “There are no mitigating factors, so it has to be a red card.”

Biggest wish for France 2023
SJ: That referees crack right down on dissent, appealing, elongating of rucks, chats before lineout time, and



do not use the names of players in a chummy fashion.

SB: For Finn Russell, left, to dazzle despite the quality of the opposition. For “panache” to eclipse “pragmatic” in the phrasings of Times writers. For the gods to favour those who would dare. For fans to enjoy it, whatever the fortunes of their team. For rugby to matter more than petty nationalism.

RUGBY WORLD CUP 2023

Leinster's Keenan has proved himself to be a world-class full back since his debut in 2020



INPHO/DAN SHERIDAN

THE TOUGHEST TEST YET

If Ireland do lift the trophy next month, it would be the greatest feat of any World Cup winners

SHANE HORGAN



Former Ireland wing

This Ireland team have ticked every box along the way to France: a series win in New Zealand last summer; beating South Africa and Australia last November; completing the Six Nations grand slam in March; coming through the August warm-up matches unbeaten and – apart from the knocks picked up by Cian Healy and Dan Sheehan, which I will come on to – they have a fully-fit squad. Ranked No1 in the world, Ireland are the only international team yet to lose in 2023.

So why am I anxious? Naturally, the draw – South Africa and Scotland in the pool stage, probably New Zealand or France in the quarter-finals if we make it that far – is a concern. Then there are the ghosts of World Cups past. Admittedly, the signs of decline could already be discerned earlier that year during the Six Nations but the 2019 tournament was a huge let-down after the highs of 2018.

Memories of the previous time it was held in France trigger my own psycho-drama with the tournament. It may have been 16 years ago but the emotional scars of a poor build-up and mediocre performances against Georgia and Namibia and chastening defeats by France and Argentina in the pool still run deep. You look at Ireland's World Cup DNA – the only one of the home unions never to have made it to the semis, twice missing out on the last eight – and it's not as healthy as that of their rivals.

South Africa, for example, have consistently shown that they are set up for tournament rugby and their 2023 game plan and squad are no

exception. They have many of the squad who were world champions four years ago, are a match for anyone physically and have strength in depth (the Bomb Squad, etc). Naturally, they will exploit any physical supremacy to maximum benefit but they also have world-class finishers out wide.

Their passage to the semi-final is just the same as Ireland's but if they make it that far you suspect they will have more in the tank physically and, because it won't be new territory for them as it would be for Ireland, they won't be emotionally spent either.

That said, I have no difficulty imagining Scotland coming out on top against the Springboks a week today. I'm not saying it will happen but Gregor Townsend's team are coming to the boil nicely. If you look back to the Six Nations game against Ireland at Murrayfield, the first half at any rate, you see that they are one of the few sides to have tested Ireland out in the wide channels. There were times during that opening 40 minutes when the Irish defence was stretched to its limit and only a combination of luck, desperation and Scottish inaccuracy kept the home side's try count to one. South Africa won't find it any easier.

If that all sounds rather pessimistic from an Irish perspective then let me sketch out the grounds for optimism. Andy Farrell is a coach who projects authority and commands respect. He knows how to manage expectations. As for Johnny Sexton not having played a competitive game since the grand-slam match against England in March, that doesn't worry me. Johnny knows his body, his game and the system. He will be fine. Romania on Saturday is a good fixture for him to settle back into Test rugby.

You look at Ireland's World Cup DNA – never made it to the semis – it's not as healthy as their rivals

WORLD RUGBY RANKINGS

- 1. Ireland
- 2. South Africa
- 3. France
- 4. New Zealand
- 5. Scotland
- 6. Argentina
- 7. Fiji
- 8. England
- 9. Australia
- 10. Wales

IRELAND AT THE WORLD CUP

	Pool	QF	SF	Final	Winner
1987					★
1991					★
1995					★
1999*					★
2003					★
2007					★
2011					★
2015					★
2019					★

*Quarter-final playoff

I see Garry Ringrose at outside centre as a key man in both attack and defence, while behind him it's staggering how quickly, almost imperceptibly, Hugo Keenan has become a world-class full back. Safe under the high ball, great positional sense and vision, an outstanding runner both in broken and structured play, he is the complete footballer. Mack Hansen is another who has overperformed. Or is that harsh on the Connacht wing? Maybe it's simply a case of him needing the international stage to realise his full potential.

Up front, the options across the back and second row are strong and in Caelan Doris, Ireland have the outstanding northern hemisphere forward. Josh van der Flier hasn't been bad either. It gets more complicated in the front row. Healy would have been the second-choice loose head to Andrew Porter but in this era, especially when you have to play South Africa, your bench prop needs to be first-choice quality. Healy hit that standard when he came on against Scotland six months ago. His is not a decisive loss but it's not helpful.

Unlike Healy, the hooker Sheehan has been included in the squad but we can't be sure when he will be fit to start. Ronan Kelleher would usually play in his absence but he too picked up a knock in August. That leaves Rob Herring. The Ulster player may be as good as the first-choice hookers for England, Scotland and Wales but Sheehan is in a class of his own.

These issues make Farrell's selection for the first two pool games fascinating. Romania won't trouble Ireland and you would think most of the fit, first-choice players will start, but what about the Tonga game? The Pacific Islanders should be dispatched but they will be physical.

That raises the risk of injury, so how many of the team Farrell would like to line up against the Springboks on September 23 will feature against Tonga? Do you risk starting Sheehan against South Africa if he hasn't had any game time in France?

Ireland are quite capable of beating South Africa but how many wounded soldiers will they be taking into the Scotland contest a fortnight later? The questions add up and we haven't even raised the spectre of a quarter-final against the hosts or New Zealand.

That's why if Ireland were to lift the Webb Ellis trophy on October 28, it would be the greatest achievement of any World Cup-winning side.

'I was told to harden up – but the anxiety wouldn't go away'



Kirwan the former All Blacks wing, below, has become a mental health pioneer

All Blacks legend John Kirwan, who scored one of the World Cup's greatest tries, tells *Stephen Jones* how he's helping others cope with demons that plagued him

STEPHEN JONES



Rugby Correspondent

One glorious try helped to establish the World Cup for ever. In the first match of that tournament in 1987, New Zealand chose on the right wing the tall, blond, dashing figure of John Kirwan, still relatively new to the All Black jersey.

The image of Kirwan, later a dedicated surfer and coffee society Aucklander, was far removed from that of the traditional All Black, perceived as a glowering, farming forward with beetle brows.

In the first match against Italy, Kirwan was given the ball deep in his own territory. He set off at pace, weaving in and out of blue jerseys and accelerating past cover defenders. He stepped cleverly left and right and ran on to score. It was a glorious try by a man who became loved across national boundaries for his attacking gifts.

He is now Sir John. When he was knighted in the Queen's Birthday Honours list of 2012, the official citation took its time getting round to his rugby career.



It began by hailing his efforts in raising awareness about mental health and depression, in particular.

He was motivated by his own problems at a time when mental illness was never understood. His mother once developed some of the same symptoms and her doctor came up with two suggestions. "He prescribed cigarettes and Valium. So my mother, who had never smoked, then went on smoking until she was 86. The doctor gave her vices," Kirwan says.

He was in London last month to launch the European arm of Groov, his already highly successful company which offers companies hi-tech but personal means of prevention of mental illness, so that they can help their employees. The package can be installed on any workplace communications device, and can adapt to each individual to help them with their own particular experiences. "It will start learning about you as you go," Kirwan says. "It is science-based so it might prompt you to breathe properly, to have a cup of tea so that you are conscious of that cup."

"When I was really ill, I never thought whether a shower was good or not; I never enjoyed coffee. When I was better, I loved a shower, and I still love my cafe breaks."

One of his own escapes was to learn to play the guitar. "It sounded horrible but [playing well] wasn't the point of doing it," he says. "There is no work/life balance anymore, so we

need to free up the space, maybe just learn how to take five minutes. We have more inputs in our brains now in one day than our grandparents had in a lifetime – everything is back-to-back. Perhaps there are suggestions for us to slow down a bit."

He suffered in an era when proper support was sparse. Less than a year after the great try, Kirwan started getting horrendous panic attacks, out of the blue, accompanied by "an incredible jolt of adrenaline". He became terrified to perform relatively menial tasks, sometimes spending days in floods of tears, feeling ghastly even when he was wearing the Black jersey.

Bewilderingly to an outsider, Kirwan managed to have "imposter syndrome" at the same time as he was being toasted as a truly great player. "Yes, the worst thing was that I had no reason to be depressed – great family, great upbringing, All Black at a young age. Wake up to yourself, Kirwan, look in the mirror."

Sean Fitzpatrick came into the team at the same time. "Fitz told me in later years he was terrified of speaking up in the group, absolutely terrified, and this is Fitz," Kirwan says. "He remembers that I used to go straight in there and tell them exactly what I thought. No one realised."

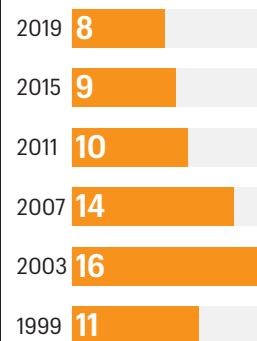
"Eventually, the anxiety attacks just kind of stayed. I played from around 1990 at about 60 per cent because I was living in fear of something jumping out of the cupboard. Sometimes, it used to hit me like a sledgehammer. Depression would be

“

The worst thing was that I had no reason to be depressed. Wake up to yourself, Kirwan

CLOSING THE GAP?

Number of matches where a team has won by 40+ points (since tournament expanded to 20 countries)



my constant companion." He played a season in Italy and had a savage panic spasm as he packed for home because he realised that most of the bad stuff had arisen when he was in New Zealand. "All the bad feelings were associated there," he says. "So I had a three-hour anxiety attack on the plane back down under."

"I was scared that I was going to smash the plane up." He would spend days in floods of tears.

"Harden up," was the advice of his friend – then and now – Craig Green. But he started gaining confidence and knowledge of how to control his anxieties, with help from the All Black doctor John Mayhew, among others. Slowly, he started to improve.

He had the insight to grasp that "the world needed a really good understanding of mental illness so fewer people suffered, and we have kept all this stuff closed for 100 years." These days, he still performs the breathing exercises and other aspects of a prevention plan. He also created the JK Foundation, which has raised millions in New Zealand and for projects across the world. He and his colleagues have introduced world-leading mental-health programmes into the school curriculum.

To be an All Black was a pressure in itself. All three of his offspring are gifted but in separate sporting fields, which Kirwan loves. One day, he was aware that one of them, Luca, seemed downcast. Eventually, he spoke up. "Dad," he said. "What if I never become an All Black?" Kirwan senior was able to disarm him on the spot.

As we spoke, I felt another kind of shock myself – that yet another gifted, driven and opinionated ex-player is lost to the game's administration. It is one of rugby's resounding, crippling tragedies. "Rugby has some incredible challenges ahead of it," Kirwan, now 58, says. "From a leadership point of view, we need to modernise, constitutions need to change and we need to move way quicker otherwise we're going to be left behind."

He provided manna from heaven especially, with his call for the recruitment of dynamic and gifted leaders for the sport who are not simply union time-servers: "We can't have all the unions deciding on the future of the game because it slows everything down the farce around Owen Farrell was their fault," he says.

"It's their fault because they are not looking at things in the right way. They're way too reactive and they've got to start seeing into the future a wee bit more."

He is also definitive in regard to the red-card blizzard and what it does to the game in its wake. "In the southern hemisphere we have a 20-minute red card. From a legal point of view, you might feel that's wrong. But I have paid a lot of money to go and watch 15 playing 15, and we need to be more fan-centric, right?"

But the old All Black in him is still alive. "Let's also make sure that at least once a series the players of both sides are sitting together and either having a drink or a meal because that is what is going to distinguish our game from all the other professional sports. We must make sure these key things are respected."

"The Women's World Cup was amazing – you had dads there with their daughters and mums there with their daughters and it was just beautiful to see. You can do these things without ripping the soul out of the game."

RUGBY WORLD CUP 2023

What price power?

Modern rugby's insistence on collisions over creativity has robbed World Cup of several of game's brightest talents

DAVID WALSH



Chief Sports Writer

It was something the game had never seen. Five minutes into the second half at Twickenham nine days ago seven South Africa replacement forwards began to mass near the halfway line. Two minutes later the "Bomb Squad", as this team within a team have become known, ran onto the pitch. As pre-World Cup statements go, it was striking.

At precisely the same point four years before, the Springboks had released a pre-World Cup photograph of 21 players in their changing room. Twenty of the 21 were topless and most of them so ripped they could have taken part in the World Bodybuilding Championships in the UAE on their way home from Japan. Jesse Kriel, at the centre of the photo, would have won a second gold medal.

Now here they were against New Zealand, hauling off seven of the pack that for 46 minutes had pulverised the All Blacks. Twenty-one points clear, there was no need for the Bomb Squad to do anything other than carry on where the starters had left off: their rivals were already down to 14 men and performing way below their normal level.

The game petered out to a 35-7 Springboks victory and all that remained was the image of the replacements galloping into the fray. South Africa had reminded every other World Cup contender that in terms of power and depth, no team matches them.

To some, seven forward replacements were an affront. "What South Africa did is totally against the spirit of the game and certainly against player safety. The South Africans are just abusing the bench at the moment," the former Scotland coach Matt Williams said on the Dublin-based radio show *Off The Ball*. The Springboks had broken no law and the "spirit of the game" is not easily defined.

That Dublin noticed South Africa's innovative use of replacements was not surprising. On the third weekend of the World Cup, Ireland will have to contend with the Springboks' power.

On an RTE podcast the former Leinster second row Mick Kearney shot the breeze with former Ireland hooker Bernard Jackman about the Bomb Squad.

"Rassie Erasmus [South Africa's director of rugby] strikes me as a direct character," Kearney said, "so I'd be interested to know whether he sits down the six or seven forwards that are going to be coming off and says to them, 'Look, you have 40, 50 minutes to burst your bollocks here and then we're going to bring on the other six mutants off the bench.'"

"Seven mutants," corrected Jackman.

"Seven mutants, yeah, seven mutants," Kearney agreed.

Williams' point about the Springboks' replacement strategy being "against player safety" is, at the very least, arguable. Studies have shown the greater proportion of rugby injuries happen in the second half, as players become fatigued. When South Africa replace seven of their pack while the All Blacks replace six, they are both reducing the chances of players suffering injury. It's also worth noting that the Bomb Squad Boks won their battle against diminished, off-colour rivals by just seven points, 14-7.

Is this pursuit of power creating a doping culture within the sport? After recent positive tests for the Wales scrum half Rhys Webb and the South African fly half Elton Jantjies, the question needs to be addressed. Webb tested positive for growth hormone, Jantjies for clenbuterol, a fat-burning drug that raises your metabolic rate. Both of these prohibited drugs can be used to build muscle. According to UK Anti-Doping figures

“

You either be the NFL or a global sport where parents can encourage kids to take part



Jantjies, left, and Webb have both returned positive doping tests recently but both deny wrongdoing

there are more rugby players (league and union) serving doping bans than participants in any other sport.

With so much focus on South Africa's steamrolling forwards, it was easy to miss the truly sublime brilliance of Canan Moodie in the mid-field. His balance, pace and skill are off the scale and though he is only 20, he already looks the game's most exciting player. For all his brilliance, Moodie hasn't got the power of his rival for the No13 shirt, Kriel, and so may not get in the Springbok team for the biggest games at the World Cup. That would be an indictment of what rugby has become.

Consider these numbers: the South Africa-New Zealand game at Twickenham lasted 107 minutes, the 27 extra minutes consumed by injuries and the time it takes the match officials to review incidents. Of that 107 minutes, the ball was in play for 33 minutes. Excepting Pieter-Steph du Toit, 14 South Africa forwards each had 17 minutes of ball-in-play action. Gladiatorial does not begin to describe it.

No one though can remain blind to the toll being paid by players for a game that still insists on power over athleticism, collision over creativity. Already long, the injury list lengthens each day. France admitted late last week that they are unlikely to have the hugely influential Jonathan Danty for their opening game against New Zealand on Friday. The hosts have already lost the fly half Romain Ntamack for the entire tournament and prop Cyril Baille for their opening game.

Not that the All Blacks are any better off. Already without the second-row Brodie Retallick and the flanker Shannon Frizell for the opener, they are now likely to be without the prop Tyrel Lomax, who suffered a deep gash to the thigh against South Africa. In the same pool as France and New Zealand, you may imagine Italy could

Welcome to France

To find out more about Le Touquet, where England will be based during the World Cup pool stage, turn to: TRAVEL, PAGE 5

do well against weakened opponents but they have lost Tommaso Menoncello, Edoardo Padovani, Leonardo Marin and Gianmarco Lucchesi.

Maybe Romania could avail themselves of Italy's woes to achieve an unlikely victory? Alas for the Romanians, they've lost their captain and talisman Mihai Macovei, their young fly half Mihai Muresan and centre Paul Popoia. Every team have had their own injury catalogue. England lost Jack van Poortvliet and Anthony Watson, Ireland Cian Healy and Wales Ken Owens. Ireland, though, will have seen their dangerous second opponents, Tonga, have been weakened by injuries to Israel Folau and Telusa Veainu. Tonga are hoping that the great Charles Piutau comes through his injury problems.

Once the ankle and knee supports are pulled on and the warriors enter the arena, they will then expose themselves to the most common of all rugby injuries, concussion. Willie Stewart, professor of neuropathology at the University of Glasgow, has looked at the impact of brain injury in rugby for more than a decade and believes the game has to change.

"I expect it to change after this World Cup," he said. "Actually this

change has already started at community and grassroots level by lowering tackle height. I believe this will be trickled up very rapidly to the professional game. This is one thing they can do to lessen injury risk. I also suspect that World Rugby will start promoting heavily the more accessible forms of the game. I can see touch rugby becoming a globally marketed sport and that would be welcome.

"If rugby really wants to make player welfare its No 1 priority, they're going to get this World Cup out of the way and between now and next year, all sorts of things are going to happen that will make rugby look different. You either become the NFL and concentrate on that big, brutal spectacle or you want to be a global sport where parents can encourage their kids to take part without worrying about brain injury."

As a tournament the 2023 Rugby World Cup promises more than all that has gone before. In a pool with both South Africa and Scotland, who can be sure that Ireland, the world's top-ranked team, will even get to the last eight? England won't feel any certainty about escaping a pool that includes Argentina and Samoa and Wales will fret about their opening game against Fiji. As for France against New Zealand, this the most keenly anticipated first game in the history of the tournament.

Because of their power and size, the Springboks are favourites. Already you can see them outplaying their opponents at set pieces, winning penalties and storming into collisions. The game has already become the brutal spectacle that Stewart alludes to. It would be nice to think that when the World Cup reaches its climax, we would be talking not of Springbok power but of Moodie's sublime talent.

Right now the odds favour the guys with the power.

ANTHONY AU-YEUNG/GETTY; STEPHEN MCCARTHY/SPORTSFILE

Tennis US Open

MANU FERNANDEZ/AP



Alcaraz dropped a set against Evans, inset, but recovered to prevail in an entertaining match

How did Katie Boulter do?

To find out how the Briton got on last night in her third-round match at Flushing Meadows, go to: [THETIMES.CO.UK/SPORT](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/sport)

MATCHSTATS

◆ C Alcaraz	◆ D Evans	
6	Aces	8
4	Double faults	5
57	First serve in %	58
73	Win % on first serve	69
35 (6/17)	Break points won %	29 (2/7)
61	Winners	28
23	Unforced errors	24
132	Total points won	106

backhand pass after being lobbed. But he tamely gave it straight back by hitting a double fault and was subsequently warned by the umpire for hitting a ball into the crowd in frustration. Although Alcaraz was in charge at two sets up, Evans was starting to look more comfortable in the longer rallies. He made only one unforced error in the third set and forced his Spanish opponent to step up his level in the fourth. The pivotal moment came when Alcaraz hit an astonishing forehand pass out of position for the break at 4-2.

"That pass took the wind out of my sails," Evans said. "He chases every ball. It was an entertaining match."

Alcaraz has not been at his best in the first week but he has still only dropped one set in three matches. The Wimbledon champion is bidding to become the first man since Roger Federer to defend the US Open.

"Of course I watched the draw and I see the opponents I can play against but I am focused day by day," Alcaraz said. "To defend the title here is a goal for me. I would love to be part of tournament history with Roger. This is my main goal."

Cameron Norrie joined Evans in exiting the tournament with a very disappointing display on Court 17. The British No1, seeded No16 here, lost 6-3, 6-4, 6-3 to Matteo Arnaldi, the world No61 from Italy, to miss out on a match against Alcaraz in the last 16.

"I was hitting the ball really well all week," Norrie said. "I didn't have the shot tolerance to hang with him. He was crafty. Credit to him. It's not been a good year at the grand-slam events [Norrie did not progress further than the third round at any of the four majors]. It is not where I want to be."

ON TV TODAY

US Open, day seven
Sky Sports Arena, from 3.30pm

Gutsy Evans beaten but not before giving Alcaraz scare

STUART FRASER



Tennis Correspondent
New York

Dan Evans bowed out of the US Open third round but not before leaving a considerable impression on a capacity crowd of 22,000 inside the biggest tennis stadium in the world. The British No2 used all his craft and guile to push Carlos Alcaraz, the world No1, to four sets in one of the most entertaining matches contested this year on Arthur Ashe Stadium.

The excitable New Yorkers were so thrilled with what they had witnessed that they gave Evans a standing ovation as he left the court. In a match that could have quickly and easily got away from him after a blistering start by Alcaraz, Evans dug deep to ensure that the scoreline ended a respectable 6-2, 6-3, 4-6, 6-3 after three hours and 11 minutes.

Most tennis players these days prefer to hang back and bash the ball back and forth from the baseline. Evans, 33, and Alcaraz, 20, produced a delightful antidote to this, using their variety to place different-paced shots in all areas of the court. Ultimately, however, it

was the ferocious power of the Alcaraz groundstrokes that gave him the edge.

"Dan is a tricky opponent," Alcaraz said. "It was a pretty good match. A lot of different situations than other matches. We played great points. That made us smile, Dan as well. It is great to see that on a tennis court. We play to make the people happy, to entertain them and we try to make fun in the match. It's great to have those kinds of points and feel the energy."

Initially, Evans struggled to make any mark on the match. After 19 minutes he found himself a double break down at 4-0. He also became distracted by a spectator who had

mistakenly sat down beside his staff and family in a courtside box; he ordered the confused male to leave.

Evans hit back in the second set with a break for 2-0, producing one of the shots of the tournament with a

“

We played great points. That made us smile. We play to make people happy, to entertain them



Draper puts injury strife behind him to make last 16 of a major for first time

Stuart Fraser

Even after Jack Draper decided last Sunday to give the US Open a go, he could not have envisioned this being the first grand-slam event at which he would reach the second week. Pain in the 21-year-old's left shoulder had left him unable to hit his serves at full pelt.

Draper has somehow overcome this to reach new heights in his career. A 6-4, 6-2, 3-6, 6-3 victory against Michael Mmoh, the world No89 from the United States, has taken him into uncharted territory in the last 16 of one of the sport's four major tournaments. He is the last British representative remaining in the men's singles draw.

This is an impressive turnaround

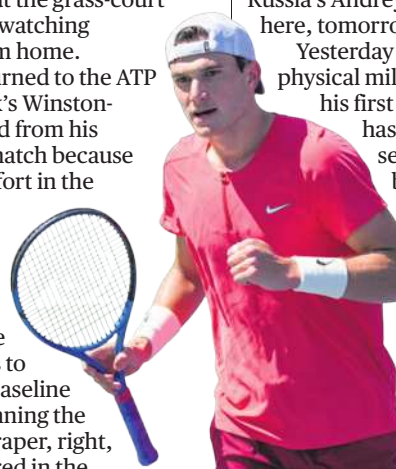
after a miserable summer. Draper's shoulder was so sore in May that he decided to sit out the grass-court season, instead watching Wimbledon from home.

When he returned to the ATP tour at last week's Winston-Salem, he retired from his second-round match because of more discomfort in the shoulder.

His fitness was given a thorough test yesterday by Mmoh, a passive player who likes to engage in long baseline rallies. After winning the first two sets, Draper, right, looked a little tired in the

third set before a second wind saw him through in the fourth. He plays Russia's Andrey Rublev, the No8 seed here, tomorrow.

Yesterday also marked a physical milestone for Draper as his first victory in a match that has gone beyond three sets. There have long been questions surrounding his overall fitness because of a series of withdrawals and retirements; in the third round of last year's US Open he quit during the third set against Karen Khachanov because of a hamstring issue.



"I don't think this is the best tennis I have had," Draper said. "But I've never won a four-set match before even though I've been [in the] top 50 in the world."

"I haven't had much grand-slam exposure. I've had tough draws and I've not been able to progress as much in the tournament as I'd have liked."

"For my body to be the way it was today, I'm very proud of myself. That's a testament to the work I've put in as well. It's not been easy for me the last year or two with the injury struggles I've had. I come into each tournament thinking, 'Oh, am I going to hold up this week?'"

"The best of five sets is a bit different, and to do it at this level, I'm very pleased with myself."

Cipriani

Unmasked

Forever painted as the problem child of England rugby, the former fly half has now given his side of the story

DANNY CIPRIANI



The 2015 World Cup summer training camp consists of miles and miles of running in the thin Colorado air, everyone in pieces, their bodies screaming. Ridiculous amounts of running, constant fitness tests, a total waste of time. But I can't complain. Lanny's [coach Stuart Lancaster] forgiven me, while others have been jettisoned for lapses in discipline, including Dylan Hartley for headbutting an opponent and Manu Tuilagi for assaulting some coppers.

After a running session, they'll ask us to play 15 v 15, and the quality is woeful because everyone is knackered. I don't think we've played any decent rugby since we arrived. The tone is set by Andy Farrell, which means everything is based on emotion. Andy's a big personality with a commanding presence, so no-one wants to confront him, including Lanny.

I'll give you an example of the madness: they've started recording how long players spend on the floor and how quickly they get back on their feet. They've even created a list! Chris Robshaw is top, the best getter-upper in the squad. No wonder he's captain. If you tell a group of athletes, "This is what you need to do in order to be seen and picked", however mindless it is, that's all most of those athletes will think about. But I'm thinking, who gives a shit? Surely it's more

important what they do when they're actually on their feet?

I've hit it off with Sam Burgess, who's been brought over from rugby league. Like me, Sam realises things aren't right. "It's meetings about meetings," he says. "Why is everyone being treated like kids?"

He's bang on, it feels like we're on a school trip rather than preparing for a World Cup.

Lanny's obviously read all the right books, and is a whizz with a whiteboard, but he's not big on feel. All this stuff about putting pride and passion back into the Red Rose – 'DO IT FOR ENGLAND AND ST GEORGE!' – sounds great to some people. But pride and passion in abstract things like symbols has got nothing to do with playing good rugby. It's performative, and means nothing when you step over that white line on match day.

The first chance we get, Sam and I, plus a few others, decide to escape the intensity and let our hair down. Going out is not strictly against the rules, but what we get up to is. We're at a strip club when we find out about a house party in Denver, so we jump on the back of some guy's pickup truck and head on over.

We've been at the party about ten minutes when Sam starts feeling sick. Too much Jack Daniel's. But thank God for that, because we head back to the hotel and manage to slip into our rooms without being spotted.

Everyone knows there's a clique of players which helps run the team: Owen [Farrell], George Ford, Chris Robshaw, Dan Cole, Ben Youngs, a couple of others. They're called "the leadership group", but they're more like the mafia, always appearing to be scheming. Still, I get on fine with most of them. At least I think I do. Sam's in a WhatsApp group with the mafia, until

The interview

Danny Cipriani opens up to Hadley Freeman
MAGAZINE, PAGES 22-29



one day, he posts a picture on Instagram of me and him in a coffee shop. A few hours later, George screenshots the picture and messages it to Sam, before removing him from the group. Sam couldn't care less, but I think, I'm not sure what I've done to offend them, but clearly I'm not as welcome as I thought I was.

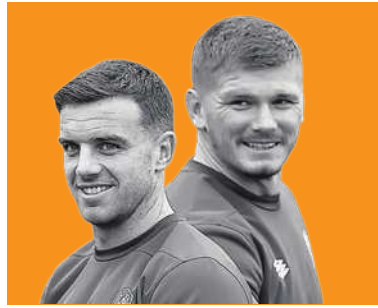
I'm picked on the bench for the warm-up match in Paris in August. When the coaches finally decide to give me a run after 63 minutes, the camera shows me looking at them, and it's not difficult to see what's going through my mind: Don't you think I can do anything in 17 minutes? F** you...

I'm on at full back, but still manage to catch the eye. The tempo increases, we've suddenly got some zip, and I score our first try with eight minutes remaining. A bit of footwork, slowing down to sow doubt in the defender's mind, then speeding up and powering over the line. Another late try makes the scoreline look respectable, 25-20 to France, but apart from those final 17 minutes, it's been a dismal performance. I'm voted man of the match and most people seem to think I've done enough to secure my place in the final World Cup squad.

But as I'm leaving the press room

Farrell and Ford running the England show

‘Owen and George are part of the leadership group – but it’s more like the mafia’



Lancaster cutting him from 2015 World Cup squad

‘When Stuart leaves me out, I tell him: You copped out. You never even played me at 10’



A bust-up in training with England assistant coach

‘The way Mike Catt treated me that day looked like straight-up bullying’

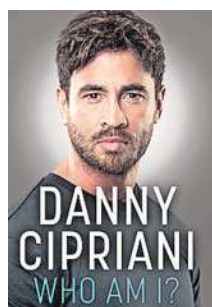


after my man-of-the-match interview, I hear Lanny being asked about my performance. “Danny was good,” he says, “but everyone else who came on was good as well.” That’s when I knew they’d already made their minds up.

Lanny breaks the bad news to me the following Tuesday. He’s only picked two fly halves, Owen and George, and he’s gone with Mike Brown and Alex Goode at full back. I say to him, “You copped out, mate. You never even played me at 10. But I did all I could and I respect your decision.” And that was the end of it. Other players who get bombed out have meetings that last half an hour.

I’ve just been told I’m not in the World Cup squad and now I’m pushing a heavy sled around the field. It’s mindless, as dumb as it gets, but I’m mucking in. Suddenly, our attack coach Mike Catt screams, “For f***’s sake, Danny, put your back into it!”

I don’t say anything, but I give him a puzzled look and think, What the f*** is his problem? Catt’s had beef with me for years. He’s slagged me off in the papers, called me a liability, and he once whacked me around the head when I was playing for Wasps and he was playing for London Irish. When the final whistle went, I refused to shake his hand, and his team-mates accused me of being a dickhead. But



Extracts from *Who Am I?* by Danny Cipriani, published by Harper Collins on September 14, £22

as far as I was concerned, it was all water under the bridge.

I get back to pushing this sled, a bit of anger in me now, and a couple of minutes later, Catt comes at me again: “F***ing hell, Danny, is that the best you can do?” I stop what I’m doing, give him my best “Don’t you f***ing speak to me like that” stare and get back to pushing, but my heart’s not in it now. I’m thinking, they’ve just told me I’m not playing in the World Cup and now this wanker’s taking the piss out of me.

Then it happens again – “F***ing shit, Danny, work harder!” – and this time I’ve had more than enough. I walk straight towards him, get in his face and say, “Have you got something to say to me, Mike Catt?” He starts stuttering, before screaming in my face, spittle flying everywhere, “As

long as I’m involved, you’ll never play for England again!”

There’s a short, but very pregnant, pause. Then I say, “You’ve just shown your true colours,” before walking off. Everyone’s stopped what they’re doing and there’s a very uncomfortable hush. As I’m walking off, Lanny’s all in a tizz: “What’s going on? Why did he say that?” I say to him, “Go and ask him.”

Some of my team-mates aren’t happy and tell Catt he’s been out of order. Joe Marler and Dan Cole, who were pushing the same sled as me, say I was putting my fair share in. Chris Robshaw asks me if I’m okay. They’re very sensitive to the situation, understand how I must have been feeling about being dropped, even before Catt got stuck into me. It looked blatantly unjust, like straight-up bullying. And people tend not to like injustice or bullies.

But when the story is leaked, I get the blame. It doesn’t matter that I tell the press it was just one of those things, and that me and Mike Catt have a good working relationship, because I don’t want to disrupt England’s World Cup preparations.

I have to be the problem, because the truth doesn’t fit the narrative they’ve been spinning for the best part of a decade.

Sex for me has become a form of self-harm

Danny Cipriani

I’ve got five months off before the 2012-13 Premiership season starts and I’ve moved in with my old Rosslyn Park mate Rory Hamilton-Brown, who became a cricketer instead of a rugby player and is now captain of Surrey.

Rory’s got a big house in Wandsworth, bought by his dad, and it gets pretty heavy pretty fast. Lots of house parties, lots of girls – not a great lifestyle for professional athletes. But we’re young, red-blooded men doing what young, red-blooded men do. At least that’s what I tell myself.

I’m not the sort of bloke who swaggers into a pub or changing room and starts boasting about his latest conquest. But it’s not exactly a secret I’m putting it about a bit. Thankfully, most of it doesn’t make the papers. When sex is one of the few things in your life that provides relief, you end up trying to find more and more unusual ways to get your hit. I’m sleeping with everyone from porn stars to actresses to girls I meet at the coffee shop. Threesomes have become the norm, but I just feel dejected when it’s over. I don’t allow myself to feel that for too long, though, and soon get back to distracting myself.

Whenever I move club, I start building up a new squad. I bring a few with me, the ones I want to spend time with, but most of the previous squad I cast adrift. It’s not unusual for me to sleep with three different women in one day. I have to be very disciplined with the timings, shuffling one girl out of the house just in time for the next one to turn up. If I suspect someone might tell stories, I won’t reveal much of myself, will give them just enough to get what I want and nothing more. I have spells when I’m only having sex with women who are married or in a relationship, because I know they won’t sell me out.

It may sound like every man’s dream, but the art of life is finding the right balance. And in that respect, sex is no different to food or drink. While it’s fine to like food and drink, if you like them too much, they can make you deeply unhappy and destroy your life. Sex for me has become a form of self-harm. I can’t do without that feeling sex gives me, but I’ll often wake up in the morning and think, F***ing hell, I certainly don’t feel happier. Occasionally, I think I’m in love. But a few weeks later, I won’t want to be anywhere near them, which tells me this thing I’m chasing isn’t love at all.

Life in Wandsworth is all a bit dark and dingy, and it strikes me that at least some people we’re hanging around with are seeking respite from their own mental anguish – I know I am. I often find myself talking through the night with Tom Maynard, Rory’s Surrey team-mate who also lives with us. Tom’s having a great year with the bat and being tipped to



Maynard’s death after a night on the town served as a wake-up call

play for England. He’s a top guy – funny, intelligent, mischievous, and a big-hearted lover of life. One day in June, we hit the town. It soon gets messy and it’s all a bit of a blur, but I’m sure it’s been fun.

When I wake up the following morning, it’s to the news that Tom has been hit by a train and killed. Tom’s death makes no sense and rocks all of us to the core, especially when we see how it has devastated his family. Some of his mates fall deeper into drink and drugs, others are shocked out of that way of life. After Tom’s funeral, I’m thinking, why am I living this way and doing these things? Things have to change.

IN MEMORY OF MAYNARD



The photo shows a tattoo which was inked onto Cipriani’s arm in 2012, writes Oliver Harrison. “TLM” stands for Tom Lloyd Maynard, while 55 was Maynard’s squad number for Surrey at the time of his death. Cipriani previously said the tattoo was there not just to commemorate his friend but also to inspire him to “grow up and be a better person”.

IN THE TIMES TOMORROW: EDDIE AND ME

You can read more exclusive extracts from Cipriani’s new book, as he recalls his fractious relationship with former England coach Eddie Jones





Martin Samuel

THE VOICE OF SPORT

Pep Guardiola would have fought harder to keep Cole Palmer if he thought he would be a first-team regular – selling him made sense



And just like that... Cole Palmer paid off the debt for the academy site that produced him.

In a transfer window that had a Saudi Arabian club bidding £150 million for Mohamed Salah, and Mason Greenwood finding a new home in La Liga, Manchester City selling one of their brightest prospects to Chelsea still ranks as the biggest surprise. Palmer looked to be on the right road at City, the Phil Foden road. Growing exposure, growing opportunity, and utterly at home as the challenges increased. He came on as a substitute in the Community Shield against Arsenal, scored the only goal of the game. Started the Uefa Super Cup final against Sevilla, did the same. And now he's gone. Why? Palmer was a boyhood City fan from Wythenshawe, seven miles down the road. He was exactly what the £100 million Etihad Complex was built to produce.

Yet Palmer isn't the first and he won't be the last either. City have already sold Shea Charles, Taylor Harwood-Bells, James Trafford, Carlos Borges and Roméo Lavia, before collecting £42.5 million for Palmer. So the facility has paid for itself, already. That's smart business. And money will continue accruing because City's standards are extraordinary now. The level their youth players have to achieve to forge a career in that shirt is beyond the wildest imaginations given what the club were.

Back in 2005, Shaun Wright-Phillips was City's jackpot sale, also to Chelsea, for £25 million. He was the club's little star, its best prospect in decades. He wouldn't get near the City squad now. It is not enough to imagine a young player holding his own in the Premier League anymore. Where the best of the elite clubs are heading it must be possible to picture that same callow teenager at Nou Camp, or the Bernabeu, or in a Champions League final. Palmer is an excellent prospect. Yet Pep Guardiola saw something, or rather he didn't, that meant when Palmer pushed to join Chelsea, he got his wish. Guardiola prioritised keeping Foden; he fought very hard, but lost, over Jadon Sancho. If Guardiola thought that Palmer was guaranteed City's first-team eventually, he would not have sanctioned his sale.

Arsène Wenger has studied player development with Fifa. "At 18, having spent my life in football, I cannot tell you who will make it," he told me. "But at 20 there is a little separation from those that will make it in the top league. And then at 23, there is another and those guys like Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo go really high up." Palmer is 21. Maybe the separation Guardiola was hoping to see did not quite happen. These are the standards that are now expected. "We are in a period now where we want things quickly," Guardiola's assistant Juanma Lillo said. It must be daunting.

Although it's not as though Palmer didn't get a good club. Chelsea, and Mauricio Pochettino, see elite

Palmer scored two goals for City early in the season but clearly felt he would get more opportunities to play at Chelsea

“

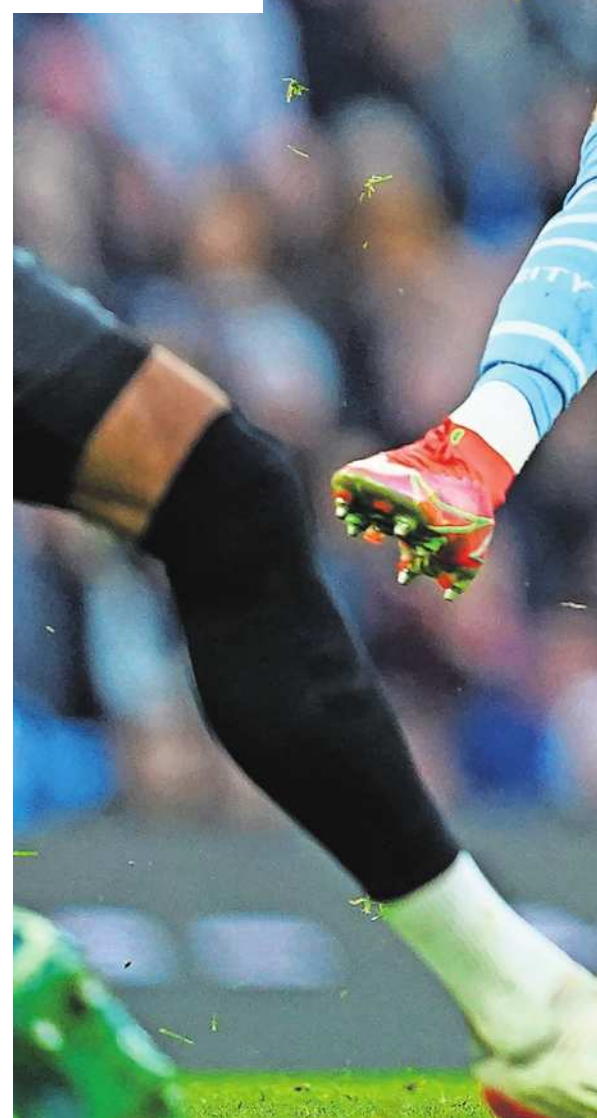
The level youth players have to achieve to forge a career at City is beyond the wildest imaginations

potential in him; just as Newcastle United, and Eddie Howe, saw the undoubted promise in Lewis Hall when he fell short at Chelsea. The career paths of Salah and Kevin De Bruyne show that not every early judgment is correct.

Gareth Southgate bemoans the absence of English players in the Premier League, yet it is hard to complain about elevated standards. A very parochial domestic competition with poor quality is no more use to an international manager than elite squads and limited local opportunity. Few leagues in Europe do not have a significant influx of foreign talent these days. At least Southgate knows that any of his players finding a berth somewhere like City will possess the skill set for international football.

And Palmer's departure raises further questions. What if there was no loan system over the age of 20? Would the talent be more widely distributed if the richest couldn't stockpile? Is it not healthier for Palmer to be at Chelsea and Hall with Newcastle United, rather than temporarily farmed out to clubs in the Championship and beyond? City have 13 players out on loan from Stevenage to Salvador. Should there not be a point at which they have to show that player a future, or let him go? And if Charlton Athletic or Sheffield United were the beneficiaries, would that not be a good thing?

Palmer's transfer leaves many perplexed, yet for any number of reasons it makes perfect sense. Players should play; we need more deals like this.



Introduce VAR to boxing? It wouldn't work

After Daniel Dubois' defeat by Oleksandr Usyk last week, there were calls for VAR to be introduced in boxing to rule on difficult decisions, like a low blow. Wouldn't work. Dubois was judged to have hit Usyk low, and the champion received almost four minutes to recover. Dubois, his trainer Don Charles, and promoter Frank Warren, all disputed the call and claimed Usyk, right, faked his distress. Would VAR resolve this? No. Some ringside said it was low, others disagreed. So it was a judgment call that a VAR might see either way. Those advocating the



Usyk had four minutes to recover after a low blow

use of technology think that all calls are black and white. As football has demonstrated, it's a bit more complicated than that.

SAUDI CLUBS SHOULD STICK TO ASIA

Perhaps the most preposterous ambition of Saudi Arabia's entry into elite football is its desire to win berths in the Uefa Champions League. Saudi Arabia already has places in the Champions League; the AFC Champions League,

running since August 15, with its group stage beginning September 18. This

season Al-Nassr, Al-Fayha, Al-Ittihad and Al-Hilal are involved. Location matters. The only reason Israel and its clubs, based in Asia, compete in Uefa competition is because nations in the region do not recognise them. Kazakhstan, Russia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and even Turkey could also choose to be Asian if they wished, with territory spanning two continents. Yet Saudi Arabia is firmly, resolutely, unequivocally Asian. Fifa's expanded Club World Cup will afford the opportunity for successful Asian clubs to play the best of Europe, but Uefa is finished if Saudi Arabia is allowed into its

Martin Samuel in The Times

You can read his Monday column, reviewing the best of the weekend's football action, by going to:
[THETIMES.CO.UK/SPORT](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/sport)



JON SUPER/AP

Entitled elites of Europe must make peace with schedule for African players

André Onana was born in the village of Nkol Ngok. Noticeably, it's not in Cheshire. So it is hardly surprising that Onana, from central Cameroon with Cameroonian parents, and coming to Europe via an academy run by Cameroon's greatest player, Samuel Eto'o, should turn out to be Cameroonian.

Onana had 34 caps for Cameroon when Manchester United bought him. So why the fuss about the Africa Cup of Nations? Onana had a disagreement with Cameroon's manager, Rigobert Song, at the 2022 World Cup and retired from international football last December. But he's 27. Wounds heal and, even if they didn't, Song isn't going to be around for ever. Onana's selection for the final Cup of Nations qualifier – a winner-takes-all tie against Burundi on September 12 – suggests a thaw. Now there are worries about the finals, taking place in Ivory Coast

between January 13 and February 11. Allowing a week for preparation, this would potentially remove Onana from Manchester United's league fixtures with Tottenham Hotspur, Wolverhampton Wanderers, West Ham United and Aston Villa, plus two rounds of the FA Cup.

Tough. Manchester United knew what they were buying when they signed Onana, and it is an insult to expect African footballers to be any less dutiful to their national team than Europeans. This happens every year when the Africa Cup of Nations plays in our season – as it must because, for parts of the continent, the summer is when torrential rains arrive – and it is time the entitled elites of Europe made their peace with the schedule.

Some players are African. They will play in Africa's continental competition, which predates Uefa's European Championship by three years. Get over it.



BROAD FINDS A GOOD LINE ON DEBUT

Stuart Broad was the breakout star of Sky's Carabao Cup coverage, as natural calling Nottingham Forest's tie with Burnley as he was bowling to David Warner. Broad had a dull game to report, yet did not make it so. At one stage he opened an update by talking about cricket and how, when a bowler returns from injury or absence, his initial priority isn't taking wickets. It's about hitting a mark, establishing a rhythm. Only then, Broad explained, would he start thinking about getting the batsman out. Noting how many in both teams were getting their first start of the season, he said the match felt like that. It was a superb analogy and he'll do well in the commentary box.

Fifa system leaves itself open to player poaching

Steve Clarke, the Scotland manager, is very pleased having apparently secured Elliot Anderson, widely regarded as the best prospect to emerge from Tyneside since Paul Gascoigne. Anderson will join Scotland's senior squad for matches with Cyprus and England, having also played for England Under-19.

It's a familiar tale. Anderson is English, born in Whitley Bay, but Scotland got in early, through a grandmother on his father's side. He has played at four age-

group levels for his adopted country, but has missed matches, too. Across four years, he has only made seven appearances in a Scotland shirt, which is strange.

"I don't think it was a difficult decision for him," Clarke said. Yet it's a decision that rests on sand. Fifa's rules state that any player featuring in no more than three competitive internationals before his 21st birthday – providing he hasn't

played in the finals tournament of a World Cup or European Championship – can still switch allegiance. If Anderson faces Cyprus, he has one competitive international, and he isn't 21 until November 6. Ireland are still sore having nurtured, then lost, Declan Rice and Jack Grealish. Yet, like Anderson, both were born English and were wooed young. It is always the risk of a system that amounts to poaching.

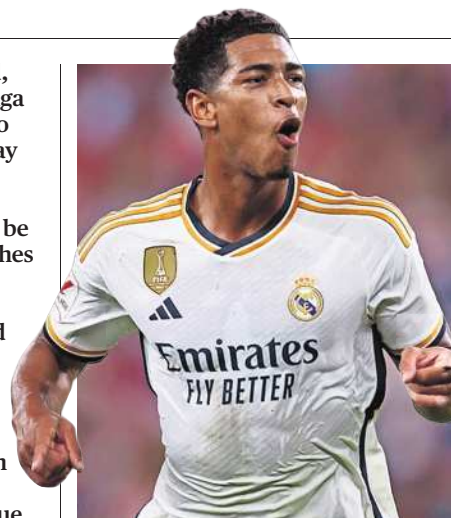


marquee competition. In Qatar, during the World Cup, we were frequently reminded that westerners should not travel the world interfering in local rules and beliefs and, largely, that is right. Yet it cuts both ways. Saudi Arabia has its own view of what is morally acceptable, of crime and punishment, and has a strong national identity. The west is, therefore, not just a cloak to be worn when there's money in it.

PREMIER LEAGUE HOME TRUTHS

Jude Bellingham, right, played his first game for Real Madrid at the Bernabeu yesterday, against Getafe.

The stadium is being rebuilt and, due to construction issues, La Liga gave them three away matches to start the campaign. They will play twice consecutively at home to redress the balance and by February 11, against Girona, will be completely caught up – 24 matches played, 12 at home and 12 away. Compare this to the Premier League where Luton Town faced the same predicament. Instead of scheduling their first three games away, they were placed at home to Burnley in week two, which was postponed when Burnley refused to switch. So, after only two matches, the league



was out of whack with two clubs having played a game less. Used to be a well-run competition, the Premier League. Used to be smart.

STERLING WRONGLY OVERLOOKED

A lot of wishful thinking is required to support Gareth Southgate's argument that Raheem Sterling is not the most in-form English player in his position. Speaking before this weekend's fixtures, Southgate referenced Phil Foden, whose best performance for Manchester City came through the middle against Newcastle United, and Marcus Rashford, largely anonymous for Manchester United so far. Sterling,

by contrast, has consistently been Chelsea's best player. Perhaps Southgate is not as comfortable with players asking to be omitted from his squads – as Sterling did in June – as he would like us to think. Equally, if Southgate subscribes to Terry Venables's belief that it should be as hard to get out of an England squad as it was to get into it – and this certainly seems the case with Harry Maguire and Calvin Phillips – shouldn't that apply to Sterling, too? He was as important for England as either of those two, and is at least putting himself up for judgment by playing. Nobody makes a mistake in the stands.

Cricket

England opener may opt for year-round franchise contract after signing off at the World Cup in India

Roy set for global tour

SIMON WILDE



Cricket Correspondent

Jason Roy says that he could sign a multi-tournament deal with Kolkata Knight Riders after the forthcoming 50-overs World Cup. Roy endured some torrid months last year when he was dropped from the T20 team and lost his full England contract, and expects a changing of the guard once England's trophy defence is over. He is "at ease" if the selectors then look elsewhere.

Roy says that "everything came crashing down" after the loss of his T20 place and full contract 12 months ago, leaving him fearful of "falling into a dark space", but he has spoken to England's white-ball captain, Jos Buttler, and he knows that Roy is now in a better mental state than he was for much of last year when he took three months out on health grounds.

Roy's selection for the World Cup gained spice from him being preferred to Harry Brook, the English game's brightest young star, and Roy needs runs in this week's ODIs against New Zealand to quash the debate.

Roy did well for the KKR franchise in this year's IPL and subsequently played for their Los Angeles team in Major League Cricket after negotiating a release from his downgraded incremental contract with England. No England player has yet signed a year-round franchise deal but Roy is contemplating it – and, apparently, not returning to the Hundred, which he won last week with Oval Invincibles.

"Potentially, yes," he said of such a deal. "The currency is always runs though. I've got to keep scoring runs, otherwise these opportunities won't come about, but there is the potential. KKR have got teams in Dubai, India, America and the Caribbean, so that's



Do they want to look at the future, which is probably the right thing? I'm at ease with it, to be honest

ON TV TODAY

England v New Zealand 2pm Sky Sports Cricket

four big tournaments. At the moment all I'm caring about is 50-overs cricket. I've parked the franchise stuff until further down the line."

First there is a World Cup to retain but he accepts that, at 33, his time as an England white-ball player may be near its end.

"It's going to be tough with the 50-overs stuff [beyond the World Cup] and I'm not in the T20 set-up. I'd have to score loads of runs [to get a T20 recall]. Do they want to look at the future, which is probably the right thing? Will Jacks be ripe for that [opener's] job. I'm at ease with it."

Maintaining ties with Kolkata was central to Roy negotiating his contract release. "I told Rob Key what was on the table for me financially and that the franchise I was going to be playing for was the same as the IPL, which is important because you want to keep relationships. He was completely happy but it wasn't a nice decision because I knew there'd be a backlash. But I wasn't missing England games and wasn't saying no to playing for my country. But going forward, I think it is different. There's this 50-over World Cup, then there's going to be that changing-of-the-guard."

Roy said that he had not feared being left out for the World Cup despite some rough patches of form.

"It never really played on my mind. We [Roy and Buttler] are close mates and we spoke about last year, [how] I was just a different person, a bit distant, and took myself away a lot because I was so worried about falling into a dark space again. It's been challenging to get to this, but I'm looking forward to the World Cup."

"It [being omitted] would have been a surprise and I'd have been disappointed, but it wouldn't have shattered me as much as last year."

Roy dropped out of cricket in March 2022. "I was shattered mentally and fell out of love with the game," he said. "Being away from home so much, away from my two kids, was really hitting me hard. I was in a bad place."

"Then, because I hadn't played, I



PICCREDIT

ENGLAND'S WORLD CUP COUNTDOWN

- Sept 8 New Zealand, Cardiff, 12.30pm
- Sept 10 New Zealand, Southampton, 11am
- Sept 13 New Zealand, Kia Oval, 12.30pm
- Sept 15 New Zealand, Lord's, 12.30pm
- Sept 20 Ireland, Headingley, 12.30pm
- Sept 23 Ireland, Trent Bridge, 11am
- Sept 26 Ireland, Bristol, 12.30pm
- All matches live on Sky Sports

was playing catch-up and started not performing. I was happy but didn't get that balance right of working hard on my game. The Hundred was a train-wreck. Everything came crashing down. I got dropped from the T20 World Cup and lost my central contract. It was an absolute ball of shit."

His recovery began during South Africa's domestic T20 last January. "I fell in love with the game again. I loved training and being around the group," Roy said.

"I joined up with England, gave myself time to get in and scored a hundred [in the first ODI at Bloemfontein]. Then we went to Bangladesh and I got another hundred, which was up there with the best for me, because the conditions were so challenging."

"This summer has been annoying because I tore my calf in my first game for Surrey. I played only three Blast games, went to America and by the time my jet lag was over I was home again. If we [Surrey] hadn't made finals day I'd have had longer there. Then the Hundred came along. I still haven't quite got my head around opening in the Hundred. You need to go harder, but it's harder to do because the ball does more."

Roy, you fancy, will make runs against New Zealand and like many of his team-mates has played enough in India to thrive there. "A lot of the wickets there are very good and you can really make hay. There are going to be some big scores. A lot of us are thinking this 50-overs World Cup could be our last. The new crop of players coming through is amazing."

"We don't want to put pressure on ourselves just because we won in 2019."

"Everyone is comfortable with where their game is. That's the benefit of playing as much as we have. It'll be exciting to get back together."

● Jason Roy was speaking at a Metro Bank event supporting girls cricket: www.metrobankonline.co.uk/cricket

FITZPATRICK CLOSING IN ON AUTOMATIC QUALIFICATION FOR RYDER CUP AS ABERG MAKES ANOTHER STATEMENT

Matt Fitzpatrick closed in on a place in Europe's Ryder Cup team as he opened up a two-shot lead after three rounds at the European Masters in Crans-sur-Sierre, Switzerland. Starting the day a shot ahead of Alexander Bjork, the Englishman carded a three-

under-par round of 67 to move to 15 under, two clear of Bjork and his Swedish compatriot Ludvig Aberg, who also has hopes of being a captain's pick for Rome. Fitzpatrick, inset, the 2022 US Open champion, needs to finish better than seventh to

take the third and final qualifying place via the world points list for the European team. At present, Tommy Fleetwood holds third place but is not playing this week. Alex Fitzpatrick, the younger brother of the leader, is three shots back

and is tied for fifth with Nicolai Hojgaard. The European Masters is the last qualifying event for selection for the Ryder Cup, which will be held at the Marco Simone club near



Rome from September 29 to October 1. A final automatic place on the European points list is also there to be won today; Robert MacIntyre holds that place at

present and the Scot shot a level-par 70 to go three under. Of the players still vying for a spot via that list, Germany's Yannik Paul is on nine under, although he is likely to need to win the title to jump ahead of MacIntyre.

Sri Lanka spinners make most of pitch – and England’s lack of experience

Simon Wilde Cricket Correspondent

This was an astonishing game. England had never previously been beaten by Sri Lanka in ten meetings in T20s and had only ever lost to them once in 26 internationals across all formats. Moreover, they had only ever lost once to anyone at “Fortress Chelmsford” and that defeat came at the hands of the mighty Australians.

Yet they were eviscerated with bat and ball by a team that historically loses around 67 per cent of T20s, dispatched by eight wickets with 6.4 overs to spare. Appropriately, the winning hit was a six swung high over midwicket off Kate Cross by Harshitha Samarawickrama, an eighteenth boundary in an innings lasting only 80 balls.

Sri Lanka looked a different outfit from the one beaten amid the rain at Hove on Thursday evening. They brought in Inoshi Fernando and tied England so thoroughly in knots on a hybrid pitch with five spinners – three offies and two left-armers – that Heather Knight’s side could muster only 104, only eight more than their lowest score in 166 games in this format. Not that they lasted the full 20 overs; they were out with 12 balls unused.

The embarrassment did not stop there. Silence descended over the home spectators as Chamari Athapaththu, the Sri Lanka captain, gave her side such an explosive start that they looked capable of chasing down a target twice as large. She signalled her intent by lofting Cross’s

second ball down the ground for four before plundering 20 from her next over, a string of boundaries capped by an imperious pull for six.

She also took 14 off Charlie Dean’s first over so that by the time the power-play was complete she had 48 to her name and Sri Lanka were 67 for one and in an impregnable position. Although Athapaththu fell for 55 to a miscued drive to long off, Sri Lanka’s tempo barely let up thanks to Samarawickrama’s unbeaten 30 from 35 balls.

Sri Lanka recently beat New Zealand in Colombo by ten wickets with a very similar bowling attack and Athapaththu again leading the charge with the bat, but that was at home, not on tour.

With next year’s T20 World Cup taking place in Bangladesh, this match suggested that England – albeit that they were not at full strength – have a lot of work to do in playing spin, and that Sri Lanka, who now have 20 players on full-time contracts, could land more surprises like this one.

England could certainly have done with Sophie Ecclestone on a surface such as this, while the inclusion of Issy Wong looked a sorry mistake as she struggled for rhythm. Her first over contained three no-balls (the first of them huge) as well as a wide while her second saw Vishmi Gunaratne swing her for three off-side boundaries.

Smiling through her post-match interview, Athapaththu said: “We bowled the right lengths and good



Wong is bowled for 13 as England were all out with two overs remaining

SPORTSWOMEN OF THE YEAR AWARDS

● Nominations for the 2023 Sunday Times Sportswomen of the Year awards in association with Citi closed last Thursday

● There are seven categories: Sportswoman of the Year; the Young Sportswoman (nominees must have been 21 years old or younger on January 1,

2023); Team of the year; Grassroots Sportswoman; Citi Disability Sportswoman; the Changemaker category (celebrating



those who have inspired others and used their platforms to create change); and the Helen Rollason award for inspiration

● The winners will be announced at a special ceremony in London on November 2. For more information, go to: sportswomenoftheyear.co.uk

Today’s racecards

Brighton

Going: good to soft-soft in places **Sky Sports Racing**

Thunderer’s tips: **1.50** Magic Memories **2.25** Lieutenant Rascal **3.00** Notre Maison (nap) **3.35** Zachary **4.10** Society Lion **4.45** Buy The Dip **5.20** Eton Blue (nb)

1.50 FREE TIPS DAILY ON ATTHERRACES.COM MAIDEN STAKES £4,320: 1M (3)

1 (1) 20020 **LUNATICK** 31 H Morrison 3-9-7 T Marquand

2 (3) 40324 **MAGIC MEMORIES** 17 (T) G L Moore 3-9-7 Jason Watson

3 (2)002232 **PATERNOSTER SQUARE** 13 S & E Crisford 3-9-7 H Burns

Betting: 13-8 Lunatick, 7-4 Paternoster Square, 2-1 Magic Memories

2.25 AT THE RACES APP MARKET MOVERS EBF RESTRICTED MAIDEN STAKES

1 (5) 62523 **BIG BROWN BEAR** 24 E J-Houghton 9-7 Georgia Dobie

2 (6) **FIDELIUS** R Cowell 9-7 S Osborne

3 (2)524034 **LIEUTENANT RASCAL** 38 G Scott 9-7 D Muscitt

4 (4) **0 LUDBERG** 40 C Wallis 9-5 G Wood

5 (3) **4 SEA OF ANGELS** 19 S C Williams 9-2 H Doyle

6 (1) **00 TILIANA** 104 (P) G Kelleway 9-0 Billy Loughnane (3)

Betting: Evens Lieutenant Rascal, 100-30 Sea Of Angels, 7-2 Big Brown Bear, 13-2 Fidelius, 33-1 Tiliana, 66-1 Ludberg

3.00 ST LEGER FESTIVAL TIPS ON ATTHERRACES.COM HANDICAP

1 (8)345140 **THANK THE LORD** 13 (V,D) S Hodgson 4-9-10 H Doyle

2 (5)253050 **NO SPEED LIMIT** 124 (P,T,D) G Baker 8-9-10 T Marquand

3 (1) 501132 **NOTRE MAISON** 23 (P,BF,CD) W Kittow 4-9-9 C Shepherd

4 (2)153400 **KYBER CRYSTAL** 15 (T,D) Alexandra Dunn 4-9-7 T Fisher

5 (6)0-5005 **LUCY LIGHTFOOT** 13 (D) B Johnson 3-9-6 Laura Pearson

6 (7)0604-6 **HAVEAGOBEAU** 124 J Boyle 4-9-4 C Howarth (5)

7 (3)003240 **ARZAAK** 33 (CD) C Wallis 9-9-3 G Wood

8 (9)50-005 **MY KIND OF GIRL** 16 A Carroll 3-9-3 R Kingscote

9 (4)603004 **ALYA’S GOLD AWARD** 3 (T) A Carroll 4-9-3 W Carson

Betting: 11-8 Notre Maison, 9-2 Thank The Lord, 6-1 Arzaak, 8-1 Haveagobeau, Kyber Crystal, 10-1 No Speed Limit, 16-1 My Kind Of Girl, Lucy Lightfoot, 50-1 Alya’s Gold Award

3.35 MANSELL MCTAGGART NURSERY

£3,245: 6F (6)

1 (6) 60045 **LINE OF FIRE** 21 B Millman 9-11 T Marquand

2 (5) 6000 **PROFICIENT** 6 (T) S Kirk 9-10 Billy Loughnane (3)

3 (1) 0001 **ART FANTASTIQUE** 20 (T,D) T Ward 9-9 H Doyle

4 (3) 3003 **ZACHARY** 13 (BF) C Johnston 9-3 R Kingscote

5 (4)406434 **BIRKIE BOY** 6 J S Moore 8-13 Olivia Tubb (7)

6 (2) 05350 **EYEROS** 20 J S Moore 8-13 Georgia Dobie (3)

Betting: 15-8 Art Fantastique, 2-1 Zachary, 5-1 Line Of Fire, Birkie Boy, 16-1 Proficient, Eyerost

4.10 SKY SPORTS RACING SKY 415 HANDICAP

£5,129: 6F (7)

1 (5)023510 **SOCIETY LION** 24 (T,D) E Dunlop 6-9-13 H Doyle

2 (3)214301 **ORMOLULU** 21 (H,D) J Osborne 3-9-10 S Osborne

3 (2)003155 **MAMILLIUS** 68 (CD) G Baker 10-9-9 Billy Loughnane (3)

4 (4)2004-4 **KIT GABRIEL** 25 (P,D) D Loughnane 4-9-8 Laura Pearson

5 (6)053200 **TOLSTOY** 23 (D) S C Williams 4-9-6 M Ghiani

6 (1)212345 **SNUGGLE** 16 (B,BF,D) E Walker 3-9-5 T Marquand

7 (7) 151-00 **HOLBACHE** 15 (CD) A Carroll 5-9-1 Jason Watson

Betting: 13-1 Ormolulu, 9-2 Snuggle, 5-1 Kit Gabriel, Society Lion, 11-2 Tolstoy, 7-1 Holbach, 8-1 Mamilius

4.45 ST LEGER FORM STUDY ON ATTHERRACES.COM HANDICAP

£4,606: 1M (7)

1 (3)646301 **POETIC FORCE** 24 (CD) A Carroll 9-10-2 Mollie Phillips (3)

2 (5)043211 **OPTIVA STAR** 13 (H,C) R Hannan 3-9-10 J Leavy (7)

3 (1) 211104 **RIVAS ROB ROY** 24 (B,CD) J Gallagher 8-9-5 T Marquand

4 (4)360002 **ROYAL BLISS** 24 (H) Miss A Murphy 3-9-3 H Doyle

5 (6)0-6042 **GUITEAU** 16 D F Davis 3-9-1 O Lewis (7)

6 (7) -51213 **HITCHED** 26 (H,D) D M Simcock 3-9-0 C Shepherd

7 (2)201533 **BUY THE DIP** 16 (D) J Boyle 3-8-11 C Howarth (5)

Betting: 5-2 Optiva Star, 5-1 Guiteau, Buy The Dip, Poetic Force, 6-1 Hitched, 8-1 Royal Bliss, Rivas Rob Roy

5.20 SKY SPORTS RACING HD VIRGIN 519 AMATEUR JOCKEYS’ HANDICAP

£3,080: 1M 4F (8)

1 (7)0-2231 **ETON BLUE** 7 (CD) G Baker 5-11-8(Sex) Mr S Walker

2 (8)123-00 **FASCINATING LIPS** 39 G L Moore 6-11-4 Mr D Dunsdon

3 (3)00/60- **DINO VELVET** 102 (D) A King 10-11-0 Mr Ryan Price (7)

4 (2)445533 **STARFIGHTER** 11 (D) M Loughnane 7-10-12 Miss M Wingrove

5 (5)005002 **FEN TIGER** 13 (D) J Feilden 5-10-5 Mr R Birkett

6 (4)123643 **BREGUET BOY** 21 (P) A Watson 6-10-5 Miss B Hampson

7 (6)654003 **SILVER BUBBLE** 18 (V,CD) G Kelleway 5-10-4 Mr F Daly

8 (1)044221 **SEND IN THE CLOUDS** 13 (CD) A Carroll 6-10-0 Miss S Bowen

Betting: 13-8 Eton Blue, 9-2 Send In The Clouds, 6-1 Breguet Boy, 8-1 Fen Tiger, Starfighter, Silver Bubble, 14-1 Dino Velvet, Fascinating Lips

Worcester

Going: good **Sky Sports Racing**

Thunderer’s tips: **2.10** Jet Of Magic **2.45** Findusatgorcombe **3.20** Drumlee Spud **3.55** Olivers Travels **4.30** Dynamic Kate **5.05** Appreciate

2.10 NEU-SERVO NOVICES’ LIMITED HANDICAP CHASE

£6,337: 2M 7F (4)

1 30U4-JU **JET OF MAGIC** 35 (P,T,BF) N Twiston-Davies 7-11-10 S Twiston-Davies

2 33-323 **ANY NEWS** 13 (P,T,BF) N Mulholland 8-10-12 H Cobden

3 66/222 **POLISH** 35 F O’Brien 8-10-9 L Harrison

4 PD-513 **BUTLER’S BRIEF** 35 (P) A Ralph 8-10-7 N Scholfield

Betting: 13-8 Jet Of Magic, 2-1 Polish, 11-4 Any News, 8-1 Butler’s Brief

2.45 JOHN CORDELL MEMORIAL HANDICAP CHASE

£3,406: 2M 7F (10)

1 3323P- **DREAMSUNDERMYFEET** 140 (P) M Keighley 8-12-0 A Wedge

2 -51324 **CRESSWELL QUEEN** 10 (H,T,BF) D Hamer 8-11-1 H Reed

3 0-0232 **IF I SAY** 33 C Longsdon 6-10-9 C Chester (10)

4 035212 **JUSTSHORTOFABUBBLE** 12 (P,T,D) G Harris 6-10-9 B R Jones

5 0/2122 **SAXON QUEEN** 12 (P) P Bowen 6-10-8 S Bowen

6 4-1U4P **TOM O’ROUGHLEY** 60 (B,T,CD) Sheila Lewis 8-10-7 S Houlihan

7 /462P- **FINDUSATGORCOMBE** 242 (P) R Walford 11-10-7 Paul O’Brien

8 0-4033 **JOYFUL KIT** 15 Harriet Brown 7-10-7 D Noonan

Thunderer’s tip of the day

Notre Maison (3.00 Brighton)

This four-year-old filly lost her maiden tag on her first visit to Brighton in June and has developed a soft spot for the track, also going close on her two subsequent visits.

She usually races up near the pace and should be able to get a handy early position from stall one.

9 2UJ4-P **YA KNOW YASEFF** 55 (B,T) D Pipe 6-10-3 J Tudor

10 3040-0 **DIV INE TARA** 115 F O’Brien 8-10-2 L Harrison

Betting: 3-1 Justshortofabubble, 4-1 If I Say, 9-2 Saxon Queen, 8-1 Joyful Kit, 10-1 Cresswell Queen, Div Ine Tara, 12-1 Ya Know Yaseff, Findusatgorcombe, Tom O’Roughley, 20-1 Dreamsundermyfeet

3.20 NEU-SERVO 24 HOUR RAPID RESPONSE OPEN NH FLAT RACE

£2,614: 2M (5)

1 **THINKING THYME** E Williams 11-2 A Wedge

2 **MY KENT** B J Llewellyn 11-0 J Tudor

3 **ROCZEN** 34 K Burke 11-0 H Kimber (3)

4 **1- DRUMLEE SPUD** 176 B Pauling 10-9 Beau Morgan (5)

5 **43 NEWMILL GETAWAY** 37 D Brace 10-7 C Brace

Betting: 5-6 Drumlee Spud, 7-4 Newmill Getaway, 8-1 Thinking Thyme, 20-1 My Kent, 25-1 Roczen

Scoreboard

Second women’s T20i: England v Sri Lanka

Chelmsford (Sri Lanka won toss): *Sri Lanka beat England by eight wickets*

England	(balls)
D N Wyatt b Athapaththu	1 (4)
M E Bouchier c Dilhari b Fernando	12 (10)
A R Capsey c Fernando b Kumari	3 (9)
*H C Knight c and b Ranaweera	14 (16)
†A E Jones lbw b Ranaweera	12 (12)
F G Kemp st Sanjeeewani b Dilhari	2 (2)
D R Gibson c Ranaweera b Fernando	9 (11)
C E Dean b Prabodhani	34 (26)
S Glenn c Sanjeeewani b Dilhari	0 (4)
I E C M Wong b Prabodhani	13 (12)
K L Cross not out	1 (2)
Extras (w 3)	3
Total (18 overs)	104

Fall of wickets 1-6, 2-15, 3-21, 4-41, 5-46, 6-48, 7-65, 8-66, 9-99.

Bowling Athapaththu 3-0-11-1; Prabodhani 3-0-19-2; Fernando 4-0-16-2; Kumari 2-0-16-1; Ranaweera 3-0-25-2; Dilhari 3-0-17-2.

Sri Lanka	(balls)
*A M C J K Athapaththu c Cross b Capsey	55 (31)
†M A A Sanjeeewani c Dean b Gibson	1 (4)
H M D Samarawickrama not out	30 (35)
R M V D Gunaratne not out	18 (15)
Extras (w 1, nb 5)	6
Total (2 wkts, 13.2 overs)	110

G W H M Perera, N N D de Silva, W K Dilhari, I Ranaweera, B M S M Kumari, K D U Prabodhani and S I P Fernando did not bat.

Fall of wickets 1-10, 2-79.

Bowling Cross 2.2-0-33-0; Gibson 1-0-9-1; Dean 2-0-19-0; Wong 2-0-24-0; Glenn 3-0-11-0; Capsey 3-0-14-1.

● *Three-match series level 1-1*

Third match: Wednesday (Derby, 6pm).

areas, and the wicket was very helpful for our spinners. This is huge for us because we’d never beaten England in England and this is the first win [against them] in the T20 format. This is huge for women’s cricket in Sri Lanka.”

Knight said: “Sri Lanka were outstanding and credit to them, but we’re a very inexperienced side and that showed a bit. It shows that when you’re off a little bit in international cricket sometimes you’re going to get humbled. We kept losing wickets and we wanted the girls to take the game on [but] some of the dismissals were a little soft, mine included.”

Without Dean’s 34 from 26 balls from No 8, England would never have made as many as they did.

ON TV WEDNESDAY

England v Sri Lanka, third T20

Sky Sports Cricket, from 5.30pm

3.55 NEU-SERVO INDUSTRIAL AUTOMATION REPAIR MAIDEN HURDLE

1 F/0-35 **FULGURANT** 43 (T) S Humphrey 6-11-4 N Scholfield

2 10-3 **ISMAEL** 107 K Frost 5-11-4 L Edwards

3 2-113 **OLIVERS TRAVELS** 15 (BF) P Bowen 5-11-4 S Bowen

4 P16/5 **RED RIVER VALLEY** 12 (T) F O’Brien 7-11-4 C Brace

5 65432 **SFORZA CASTLE** 12 (P) B Pauling 5-11-4 K Woods

2/U6P- **STOP THIS TRAIN** 201 (H,T) S Humphrey 6-10-11 J Tidball (5)

Betting: 11-8 Olivers Travels, 13-8 Sforza Castle, 6-1 Ismael, 10-1 Red River Valley, 20-1 Stop This Train, Fulgurant

4.30 NEU-SERVO CUSTOMER SUPPORT MARES’ HANDICAP HURDLE

£3,406: 2M 7F (12)

1 1F-361 **DYNAMIC KATE** 33 (P,T,CD) N Mulholland 7-12-0 J A Anderson

2 33-213 **MA BELLE NOIRE** 40 (B,T) H Fry 6-11-10 S Bowen

3 -55224 **BETTY’S BELLE** 47 (P,BF) Tracey Leeson 6-11-2 Mr J Turner (7)

4 1-0660 **TOUGHASOLDBOOTS** 13 (H) D McCain 5-11-2 Abbie McCain (5)

5 12-544 **MILADYGRACE** 31 (P) M Keighley 8-10-11 A Wedge

6 4-2120 **RUBYS REWARD** 12 (T,BF,CD) D Hamer 7-10-10 H Cobden

7 0-3303 **TRE A PENI** 33 (B,T) O Greenall & J Guerriero 6-10-5 C Nichol

8 3-0603 **ONEWAY EXPRESS** 30 (P) O Greenall & J Guerriero 5-10-5 T Wynne (5)

9 26-52P **MILANESE ROSE** 47 (P,T) N Mulholland 7-10-2 H Kimber (3)

10 PP-056 **TRICKALIGHT** 33 (P) Deborah Cole 7-10-2 C Ward (3)

11 20U-00 **ORANGE GINA** 60 Mrs N Evans 7-10-2 B R Jones

12 3040-0 **DIV INE TARA** 115 F O’Brien 8-10-2 Doubtful

Betting: 9-4 Ma Belle Noire, 7-2 Dynamic Kate, 7-1 Tre A Peni, Betty’s Belle, 10-1 Oneway Express, Miladycastle, 12-1 Rubys Reward, 16-1 Milanease Rose

5.05 NEU-SERVO SUPPORTS MACMILLAN CANCER SUPPORT HANDICAP HURDLE

£4,225: 2M 4F (5)

1 /110-6 **SAN GIOVANNI** 48 (T,CD) H Fry 7-11-10 N Scholfield

2 33-111 **SECRET TRIX** 46 (P) O Murphy 6-11-9 S Bowen

3 213-F1 **CALL ME TARA** 54 (T,C,D) F O’Brien 6-11-8 Daire Davis (7)

4 0-5135 **APPRECIATE** 43 (T,CD) M Harris 5-11-4 B Harris (5)

5 1/P63- **PINNACLE PEAK** 167 (P,C,D) M Keighley 8-11-2 A Wedge

Betting: 8-4 Secret Trix, 2-1 Call Me Tara, 9-2 Appreciate, 7-1 Pinnacle Peak, 8-1 San Giovanni

FOOTBALL RESULTS

WEEK FOUR

PREMIER LEAGUE

PREMIER LEAGUE JUST KEEPS SPENDING

English sides have far outspent their rival leagues

Summer 2023 outgoings

Premier League	£2.36bn
Ligue 1 (France)	£773m
Serie A (Italy)	£728m
*Saudi Pro League (Saudi Arabia)	£690.55m
Bundesliga (Germany)	£641m
La Liga (Spain)	£378m

*Transfer window closes on September 7

* Only two of Europe’s ‘big five’ leagues spent more on transfers than they received (Premier League: net spend £1.01 billion; Ligue 1: net spend £28 million; Bundesliga: net receipt £247 million; Serie A: net receipt £142 million; La Liga: net receipt £100 million);

* Premier League clubs received a total of £550 million in transfer fees from overseas clubs, more than two-and-a-half times higher than ever before (summer 2022: £210 million), with £245 million of these receipts coming from Saudi Pro League clubs.

Source: Deloitte

BRENTFORD 2 Jensen 7 Mbeumo 90+3 HT: 1-1	BOURNEM'TH 2 Solanke 30 Brooks 77 Att: 16,973
BRIGHTON 3 Ferguson 27, 65, 70 HT: 1-0	NEWCASTLE 1 Wilson 90+2
BURNLEY 2 Foster 4 Brownhill 90+4	TOTTENHAM 5 Son 16, 63, 66 Romero 45+2 Maddison 54 HT: 1-2 Att: 21,750
CHELSEA 0 HT: 0-0	NOTT'M FOREST 1 Elanga 48 Att: 39,820
MAN CITY 5 Alvarez 31 Ake 45 Haaland 58, 70 (pen) 90+5 HT: 2-1	FULHAM 1 Ream 33 Att: 52,899
SHEFFIELD UTD 2 Archer 33 Pickford 45+3 (og) HT: 2-1	EVERTON 2 Doucoure 14 Danjuma 55 Att: 31,124

NEXT FIXTURES

Today Arsenal v Man Utd (4.30); Crystal Palace v Wolves (2.0); Liverpool v Aston Villa (2.0). **Sept 16** (3pm unless stated): Aston Villa v Crystal Palace; Everton v Arsenal (5.30); Fulham v Luton; Man Utd v Brighton; Tottenham v Sheff Utd; West Ham v Man City; Wolves v Liverpool (12.30).

		Total					Home					Away									
		P	W	D	L	F	A	P	W	D	L	F	A	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
1	Man City	4	4	0	0	11	2	2	2	0	0	6	1	2	2	0	0	5	1	9	12
2	Tottenham	4	3	1	0	11	4	1	1	0	0	2	0	3	2	1	0	9	4	7	10
3	West Ham	4	3	1	0	9	4	1	1	0	0	3	1	3	2	1	0	6	3	5	10
4	Brighton	4	3	0	1	12	6	3	2	0	1	8	5	1	1	0	0	4	1	6	9
5	Liverpool	3	2	1	0	6	3	1	1	0	0	3	1	2	1	1	0	3	2	3	7
6	Arsenal	3	2	1	0	5	3	2	1	1	0	4	3	1	1	0	0	1	0	2	7
7	Brentford	4	1	3	0	8	5	3	0	3	0	5	5	1	1	0	0	3	0	3	6
8	Aston Villa	3	2	0	1	8	6	1	1	0	0	4	0	2	1	0	1	4	6	2	6
9	Nottm Forest	4	2	0	2	6	6	1	1	0	0	2	1	3	1	0	2	4	5	0	6
10	Man Utd	3	2	0	1	4	4	2	2	0	0	4	2	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	6
11	Chelsea	4	1	1	2	5	5	3	1	1	1	4	2	1	0	0	1	1	3	0	4
12	Crystal Palace	3	1	1	1	2	2	1	0	0	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	2	1	0	4
13	Fulham	4	1	1	2	4	10	1	0	0	1	0	3	3	1	1	1	4	7	-6	4
14	Newcastle	4	1	0	3	7	7	2	1	0	1	6	3	2	0	0	2	1	4	0	3
15	Wolves	3	1	0	2	2	5	1	0	0	1	1	4	2	1	0	1	1	1	-3	3
16	Bournemouth	4	0	2	2	4	8	2	0	1	1	1	3	2	0	1	1	3	5	-4	2
17	Sheff Utd	4	0	1	3	4	7	3	0	1	2	3	5	1	0	0	1	1	2	-3	1
18	Everton	4	0	1	3	2	8	2	0	0	2	0	2	2	0	1	1	2	6	-6	1
19	Luton	3	0	0	3	2	9	1	0	0	1	1	2	2	0	0	2	1	7	-7	0
20	Burnley	3	0	0	3	3	11	3	0	0	3	3	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	-8	0

LEAGUE ONE

Portsmouth extended their unbeaten run to 17 league games as they gained swift revenge on Peterborough United with a 3-1 win at Fratton Park (Peter Wilson writes). Posh were making their second trip in five days to the south coast after knocking yesterday’s opponents out of the Carabao Cup on Tuesday. Portsmouth came from behind after Ricky-Jade Jones’s curling opener. Colby Bishop, Abu Kamara and Reagan Poole struck in 21 minutes either side of half-time, but they had Joe Morrell sent off late on. Exeter City moved to the top after Ryan Trevitt’s 75th-minute shot gave them a 1-0 win away to Burton Albion, who had substitute Steve Seddon sent off. Oxford United looked to have salvaged a point when Greg Leigh equalised in stoppage time for his



NEXT FIXTURES

Tomorrow Cambridge Utd v Reading (8.0). **Saturday** (3pm): Exeter v Leyton Orient; Stevenage v Carlisle. **Sept 16** (3pm): Barnsley v Burton; Derby v Portsmouth; Exeter v Cheltenham; Fleetwood v Oxford Utd; Lincoln v Carlisle; Peterborough v Leyton Orient; Port Vale v Northampton; Reading v Bolton; Shrewsbury v Bristol Rovers; Stevenage v Charlton; Wigan v Cambridge Utd; Wycombe v Blackpool.

SKY BET CHAMPIONSHIP

Southampton’s unbeaten league run ended with a crashing 5-0 defeat away to Sunderland (Peter Wilson writes). Jack Clarke opened the scoring with a header after 53 seconds. Pierre Ekwha’s shot was deflected in by Flynn Downes before the Frenchman powerfully curled in the third. Bradley Dack’s strike and 16-year-old substitute Chris Rigg’s header made it a bad day for Saints. Substitute Freddie Ladapo scored twice as Ipswich Town hit three goals in 20 second-half minutes to come from 2-0 down to beat Cardiff City 3-2. Will Keane also struck a double as Preston North End leapt to the summit with a 2-0 win away to Stoke City. It was their fourth straight win. Leicester City dropped off the top after their first defeat of the season. They were beaten 1-0 at home to Liam Delap’s deflected strike for Hull City. Norwich City also lost for the first time, 2-1 at Rotherham United. Mileta Rajovic hit two for Watford on his first start in their thrilling 3-3 draw away at Coventry City. Matt Godden struck the home side’s late equaliser, having had a first-half penalty saved by Daniel Bachmann. Middlesbrough are experiencing their joint worst start to a league season after losing for the fourth time in five games. They slumped to the bottom after the 2-0 home defeat by Queens Park Rangers. Millwall and Birmingham City drew for a fifth successive league game at St Andrew’s, 1-1. Kevin Nisbet’s free kick put the visitors in front. Their goalkeeper, Matija Sarkic, saved a Scott Hogan penalty before Jay Stansfield equalised. Two goals early in the second half swept Bristol City to a 2-1 win away to Swansea City. Sheffield Wednesday gained their first point of the season with a 0-0 draw at Leeds United. Blackburn Rovers fell back to earth after their eight-goal romp against Harrogate Town in midweek by losing 3-0 away at Plymouth Argyle. Jack Rudoni’s low shot deep in stoppage time gave Huddersfield Town their first win of the campaign, 2-1 away to West Bromwich Albion.

13 With 13 points, Preston are enjoying their best start to a second-tier season since 1928-29

2 Rotherham’s win was only their second in their past 18 league games against Norwich

28 Plymouth have won 28 of their past 34 home league matches



Ladapo scored twice in Ipswich’s fightback

NEXT FIXTURES

Sept 15 Hull v Coventry (7.45); Southampton v Leicester (8.0). **Sept 16** (3pm unless stated): Blackburn v Middlesbrough; Bristol City v West Brom; Cardiff v Swansea (7.45); Huddersfield v Rotherham; Norwich v Stoke; Preston v Plymouth; QPR v Sunderland; Sheff Wed v Ipswich; Watford v Birmingham. **Sept 17** Millwall v Leeds Utd (midday).

BIRMINGHAM 1 Stansfield 53 HT: 0-1	MILLWALL 1 Nisbet 6 Att: 18,710
COVENTRY 3 Van Ewijk 41 Hoedt 64 (og) Godden 87 HT: 1-1	WATFORD 3 Rajovic 35, 79 Matheus Martins 52 Att: 24,539
IPSWICH 3 Broadhead 59 Ladapo 68, 78 HT: 0-1	CARDIFF 2 Ramsey 30 Ralls 52 Att: 28,011
LEEDS 0 HT: 0-0	SHEFFIELD WED 0 Att: 36,484
LEICESTER 0 HT: 0-1	HULL 1 Delap 15 Att: 31,318
MIDDLESBROUGH 0 HT: 0-1	QPR 2 Dozzell 43, Colback 71 Att: 25,671
PLYMOUTH 3 Azaz 27, Hardie 77 Cundle 80 HT: 1-0	BLACKBURN 0 Att: 16,067
ROTHERHAM 2 Lembikisa 22, Hugill 40 HT: 2-0	NORWICH 1 Fassnacht 50 Att: 11,016
STOKE 0 HT: 0-0	PRESTON 2 Keane 51 (pen), 57 Att: 22,957
SUNDERLAND 5 Clarke 1, Ekwha 7, 45 Dack 48 Rigg 90+5 HT: 3-0	SOUTHAMPTON 0 Att: 41,459
SWANSEA 1 Cullen 10 HT: 1-0	BRISTOL CITY 2 Sykes 48, Bell 59 Att: 16,676
WEST BROMWICH 1 Swift 52 HT: 0-1	HUDDERSFIELD 2 Burgzorg 33, Rudoni 90+6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
1 Preston	5	4	1	0	8	3	5	13
2 Ipswich	5	4	0	1	11	7	4	12
3 Leicester	5	4	0	1	7	4	3	12
4 Birmingham	5	3	2	0	7	3	4	11
5 Norwich	5	3	1	1	14	8	6	10
6 Hull	5	3	1	1	9	6	3	10
7 Southampton	5	3	1	1	10	12	-2	10
8 Bristol City	5	2	2	1	5	5	0	8
9 Sunderland	5	2	1	2	9	5	4	7
10 Plymouth	5	2	1	2	8	5	3	7
11 West Brom	5	2	1	2	10	9	1	7
12 Millwall	5	2	1	2	4	5	-1	7
13 Blackburn	5	2	1	2	6	8	-2	7
14 Coventry	5	1	3	1	8	6	2	6
15 Leeds Utd	5	1	3	1	7	7	0	6
16 Stoke	5	2	0	3	5	6	-1	6
17 QPR	5	2	0	3	5	8	-3	6
18 Watford	5	1	2	2	7	5	2	5
19 Cardiff	5	1	1	3	8	10	-2	4
20 Rotherham	5	1	1	3	7	11	-4	4
21 Huddersfield	5	1	1	3	4	10	-6	4
22 Swansea	5	0	2	3	6	9	-3	2
23 Sheffield Wed	5	0	1	4	4	9	-5	1
24 Middlesbrough	5	0	1	4	3	11	-8	1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
1 Exeter	6	4	1	1	8	2	6	13
2 Bolton	6	4	1	1	12	7	5	13
3 Stevenage	6	4	1	1	8	3	5	13
4 Port Vale	6	4	1	1	7	10	-3	13
5 Portsmouth	6	3	3	0	9	2	7	12
6 Oxford Utd	6	4	0	2	9	7	2	12
7 Lincoln City	6	3	2	1	10	6	4	11
8 Barnsley	6	3	1	2	14	7	7	10
9 Wycombe	6	3	1	2	6	9	-3	10
10 Derby	6	3	0	3	11	8	3	9
11 Cambridge Utd	5	3	0	2	7	4	3	9
12 Blackpool	6	2	3	1	4	4	0	9
13 Peterborough	6	3	0	3	8	9	-1	9
14 Shrewsbury	6	3	0	3	4	6	-2	9
15 Northampton	6	2	1	3	5	6	-1	7
16 Charlton	6	2	0	4	7	9	-2	6
17 Bristol Rovers	6	1	3	2	6	8	-2	6
18 †Reading	5	2	0	3	4	4	0	5
19 Carlisle	6	1	2	3	4	6	-2	5
20 Leyton Orient	6	1	1	4	11	7	-4	4
21 †Wigan	6	3	1	2	10	7	3	2
22 Burton Albion	6	0	2	4	2	9	-7	2
23 Fleetwood Town	6	0	1	5	3	10	-7	1
24 Cheltenham	6	0	1	5	0	8	-8	1

deducted *8pts/†1pt for breaching league rules



50

Erling Haaland became the fastest player to 50 goal involvements in the Premier League (39 games)

SCOTTISH RESULTS AND TABLES

Cinch Premiership

KILMARNOCK 0

ROSS CO 1

HT: 0-0

Murray 53
Att: 5,258

LIVINGSTON 1

ST MIRREN 1

De Lucas 89
HT: 0-0

Nachmani 90+6

ST JOHNSTONE 2

DUNDEE 2

Kucheriavyi 82, 90+6
HT: 0-1

Tiffoney 35, Lamie 58
Att: 5,935

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
St Mirren	4	2	2	0	8	6	8
Celtic	3	2	1	0	7	3	7
Motherwell	3	2	1	0	5	3	7
Rangers	3	2	0	1	6	1	6
Ross County	4	2	0	2	5	6	6
Dundee	4	1	2	1	5	5	5
Livingston	4	1	2	1	4	7	5
Hearts	3	1	1	1	2	1	4
Kilmarnock	4	1	1	2	2	3	4
Aberdeen	3	0	2	1	3	5	2
St Johnstone	4	0	2	2	2	6	2
Hibernian	3	0	0	3	5	8	0

Today Aberdeen v Hibernian (3pm); Hearts v Motherwell (3pm); Rangers v Celtic (midday).

Cinch Championship

ARBROATH 2

AYR 1

Bird 21, Hylton 82
HT: 1-1

Rose 45+3
Att: 1,643

DUNDEE UTD 2

AIRDRIEONIANS 0

Cudjoe 4, Fotheringham 90+4
HT: 1-0

Att: 8,008

INVERNESS CT 1

DUNFERMLINE 1

Shaw 12
HT: 1-0

Hamilton 80
Att: 2,388

MORTON 1

PARTICK 4

Muirhead 15

Lawless 39, Graham 70, 72
Adeloye 84
Att: 2,726

HT: 1-1

Sent off: Milne (Partick) 77

RAITH 3

QUEEN'S PARK 2

Smith 8, Vaughan 86, 90+4
HT: 1-0

Turner 64, Thomas 73
Att: 2,984

Sent off: Tizzard (Queen's Park) 33

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dundee Utd	4	3	1	0	10	1	10
Raith	4	3	1	0	9	6	10
Queen's Park	5	3	0	2	8	8	9
Partick	4	2	1	1	10	6	7
Airdrieonians	4	2	0	2	5	6	6
Arbroath	5	2	0	3	6	8	6
Dunfermline	4	1	2	1	4	4	5
Morton	4	1	0	3	6	11	3
Ayr	4	1	0	3	3	8	3
Inverness CT	4	0	1	3	3	6	1

League One Alloa 1 Cove 0; Edinburgh City 0 Falkirk 2; Kelty 1 Annan 1; Queen of South 2 Montrose 3; Stirling Alb 2 Hamilton 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Falkirk	5	4	1	0	14	3	13
Hamilton	5	4	1	0	9	2	13
Stirling	5	3	1	1	5	5	10
Queen of South	5	3	0	2	12	10	9
Kelty Hearts	5	2	1	2	5	5	7
Alloa	5	2	0	3	7	10	6
Montrose	5	2	0	3	6	9	6
Cove Rangers	5	1	1	3	6	6	4
Annan Athletic	5	1	1	3	6	12	4
Edinburgh City	5	0	0	5	3	11	0

League Two Bonnyrigg Rose 5 Elgin 1; Clyde 0 Forfar 0; Dumbarton 1 East Fife 0; Spartans 0 Stenhousemuir 1; Stranraer 2 Peterhead 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bonnyrigg Rose	5	3	2	0	11	4	11
Dumbarton	5	3	2	0	10	5	11
Stranraer	5	3	2	0	6	3	11
Spartans	5	2	2	1	5	4	8
Stenhousemuir	5	2	2	1	5	4	8
Peterhead	5	2	1	2	6	4	7
Forfar	5	0	3	2	2	5	3
Clyde	5	0	2	3	2	6	2
Elgin	5	0	2	3	3	9	2
East Fife	5	0	2	3	2	8	2

NATIONAL LEAGUE

ALDERSHOT 3		CHESTERFIELD 4	
Stokes 25 Barham 59, 83 HT: 1-1 Att: 2,249		Colclough 33, Grigg 47 Naylor 53, Quigley 86 Sent off: Widdrington (Aldershot) 90	
ALTRINCHAM 1		BROMLEY 2	
Amaluzor 24 HT: 1-1		Whitely 12, Miller 87 Att: 1,921	
BOREHAM WOOD 0		BARNET 1	
HT: 0-0		Oluwo 76	
DAGENHAM & REDRIDGE 3		AFC FYLDE 1	
Hill 20, Rees 27, Mussa 58 HT: 2-1		O'Kane 44	
DORKING WANDERERS 0		EASTLEIGH 0	
HT: 0-0			
EBBSFLEET UTD 4		YORK 1	
Sterling-James 19, Domi 41 Tanner 46, Poleon 87 HT: 2-1		Siziba 28 Att: 1,724	
GATESHEAD 2		OLDHAM 2	
Hunter 58, Wearne 87 HT: 0-1		Dickenson 28, Hogan 65 Sent off: Shelton (Oldham) 89	
HARTLEPOOL 2		WEALDSTONE 1	
Crawford 11, Dieseruvwe 68 HT: 1-0		Allarakhia 73	
MAIDENHEAD UTD 0		WOKING 0	
HT: 0-0			
ROCHDALE 0		HALIFAX 1	
HT: 0-1		Harker 22 Att: 3,491	
SOLIHULL MOORS 3		OXFORD CITY 3	
Mafuta 19, Newton 28 Morrison 75 HT: 2-1		Sanderson 12 Parker 47, Ashby 81 Att: 1,146	
SOUTHEND 2		KIDDERMINSTER 1	
Cardwell 52, Powell 90+3 HT: 0-0		Morgan-Smith 80 Att: 5,402	

NEXT FIXTURES

Saturday (3pm unless stated): AFC Fylde v Aldershot; Barnet v Altrincham; Bromley v Maidenhead; Chesterfield v Dagenham & Redbridge; Eastleigh v Gateshead; Halifax v Southend (12.30); Kidderminster v Rochdale; Oldham v Dorking; Oxford City v Hartlepool; Wealdstone v Ebbsfleet; Woking v Solihull Moors; York v Boreham Wood

	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
1 Barnet	7	5	1	1	14	8	6	16
2 Chesterfield	7	5	1	1	19	14	5	16
3 Solihull Moors	7	4	3	0	14	7	7	15
4 Hartlepool	7	5	0	2	17	12	5	15
5 Ebbsfleet Utd	7	4	0	3	14	10	4	12
6 Halifax	7	3	3	1	7	5	2	12
7 Woking	7	3	2	2	10	8	2	11
8 Rochdale	7	3	1	3	10	8	2	10
9 Altrincham	7	2	4	1	13	12	1	10
10 Maidenhead Utd	7	2	4	1	6	5	1	10
11 Dagenham & R	7	3	1	3	9	9	0	10
12 Gateshead	7	2	3	2	14	12	2	9
13 Bromley	7	2	3	2	7	9	-2	9
14 Wealdstone	7	2	2	3	8	11	-3	8
15 Eastleigh	7	1	4	2	7	8	-1	7
16 Aldershot	7	2	1	4	13	18	-5	7
17 Oxford City	7	1	3	3	11	12	-1	6
18 Oldham	7	1	3	3	9	12	-3	6
19 Boreham Wood	7	1	3	3	6	10	-4	6
20 Kidderminster	7	1	3	3	3	7	-4	6
21 AFC Fylde	7	1	2	4	13	19	-6	5
22 Dorking Wanderers	7	1	2	4	7	14	-7	5
23 York	7	0	3	4	8	15	-7	3
24 *Southend	7	4	0	3	14	8	6	2

* deducted 10pts for breaching league rules

LESSONS FROM A LIFE IN SPORT
JEAN ALESI

The ex-Formula One driver on racing Ayrton Senna, meeting George Harrison and retiring

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

When my mother picked me up from school, we wouldn't go home, we'd go to the garage where she worked with my father. I had a kart there and my passion for cars began. I never dreamed of being in Formula One, though — that was too far for me.

MY BREAKTHROUGH MOMENT

It's strange because the more I progressed, the more I felt Formula One was mission impossible. But when I did make it the decision was taken in one day. In 1989, I was leading Formula 3000 when Tyrrell's Eddie Jordan called. He said, "Come immediately to England so we can make you a seat so you can race in next week's French GP". In England, Ken Tyrrell looked at me and said, "Are you OK to drive this car?" Eddie said, "Forget all that and sign the contract. You are the special one". In France, I finished fourth.

THE COACH I LOOKED UP TO

I do wish I'd had the coaches like today's generation, but I did have Tyrrell. Because he used so many French drivers, in France he was Mr Formula One. For me he was a real god, so I listened to everything he was saying.

MY CHILDHOOD HERO

I wasn't really that sort of person, but apart from my father Franco, George Harrison. The Beatles were magic and when I met him at a grand prix in Australia, I was almost paralysed.

MY FAVOURITE CIRCUIT

Monaco, because it's not a circuit and the emotion you have when you drive a F1 car through streets is crazy. All the corners are blind and you never see the line, so you just try to baby-kiss the barriers. The cars

When you saw Senna's yellow helmet behind or in front of you, it was the biggest excitement

Senna was Alesi's toughest rival to face on the track



are bigger now and some drivers get annoyed by that, but in my day it was just magical.

MY LEAST FAVOURITE CIRCUIT

Hockenheim. It was narrow, the barriers were low, but the speed was massive. I never felt safe there.

MY TOUGHEST OPPONENT

Ayrton Senna of course. When you saw that yellow helmet behind or in front of you, it was the biggest excitement. He never had a problem with anyone apart from Alain Prost and had his own small family, so he never shared lunch with anyone.

I LEARNT MOST FROM...

Discipline. When you start, you're young and excited, but you're not disciplined. Seeing the champions around you, you understand why they're champions and it's all about discipline. At the beginning, I had passion and I thought that would mean I would be top. It's not like that. The person who helped me most was Prost, my Ferrari team-mate. He was so disciplined in preparing himself and the car. He didn't fight hard early in the races, he just built and built. He was a professor.

I KNEW THE GAME WAS UP...

I said "I stop" at a press conference in Japan in 2001. Michael Schumacher was next to me and he said, "Don't say that". But I wasn't able to drive a fast car and to be just an F1 driver was not my life.

MY ONE REGRET

Sport

David Walsh

CHIEF SPORTS WRITER



Phillips and Maguire should surely want more than this?

Without thinking too much about it, I watched the Amazon Prime documentary *Kalvin Phillips: The Road to City*. Phillips was a very good footballer during Marcelo Bielsa's all-too-brief reign as the Leeds United head coach. It was the Argentinian who recognised Phillips's potential as a deep-lying defensive midfielder and convinced him of the need to get leaner and fitter.

Phillips deserves plenty of credit for the discipline, authority and intelligence he brought to the role. Leeds didn't have the greatest defenders at the time, or indeed at any time since, but with Phillips patrolling the space in front of them, they got by. The team won promotion to the Premier League at the end of Bielsa's second season.

If it was the coach's vision that inspired the revival but on the pitch Phillips was the main man, so good that he got into the England squad while playing in the Championship.

It should also be said that this place in the national team was in part down to England-qualified defensive midfielders being an endangered species. Declan Rice, Phillips and who else exactly?

The Amazon documentary tells the story of the player's move to Manchester City. On the surface, it seemed like an opportunity for Phillips to show that he could perform in one of the very best teams in Europe.

But if there had been any probing beneath the surface, there might have been some trepidation on both City's and the player's part.

What City didn't seem to know was that Phillips had played with a troublesome shoulder through his final six months at Leeds. It popped out, they put it back in and he carried on playing.

Surgery to repair the shoulder should have happened during the summer break before he started at the Etihad Stadium. It didn't. Big mistake.

The sound of chickens coming home to roost is the same in the Nou Camp as anywhere else and during his first start for City in a friendly against Barcelona, Phillips suffered a dislocated right shoulder. It was the third time he'd suffered this injury and at a City training session soon afterwards it happened again.

This was nine weeks before the start of the Qatar World Cup and so

LEE SMITH/REUTERS



Phillips played little part in the Qatar World Cup after a quiet season at City

Phillips finally had surgery. He went to the tournament with England at the end of last year and did well in a short cameo against Wales, but he was well below the level that he had achieved when excelling during England's progress to the Euro 2020 final the previous year.

There is one arresting scene in the documentary.

Pep Guardiola is doing a Manchester City press conference. This was in December last year, soon after City's players had returned from the World Cup. Someone asked if Phillips had an injury problem.

"He's not injured. He arrived overweight," the manager said.

"Why is he overweight?"

"I don't know."

"It's the player's responsibility?" asked the reporter.

"He did not arrive in condition to train the session, to play," Guardiola said, making little effort to conceal his disdain.

Guardiola then talked about how the team needed Phillips before saying the conversation he'd had with the player was private and would remain so.

There was a vague sense that Guardiola had already given up on Phillips.

In the film, Phillips explains how he had returned from the World Cup

“

In a season that ends with Euro 2024, Phillips may have jeopardised his England place

Letters to the editor

The Rugby World Cup is looming and the England team need something radical. Could I suggest that rather than the Haka, the England team face the opposition and perform the

Hokey Cokey? This will achieve two things. Firstly it will confuse the opposing side and then it will ensure England fans have at least one thing to smile about.
Fred Binns, Sedgefield

On August 27, Stephen Jones heaped praise on the talented Fiji side which beat England. Another opportunity he used rightly to point out the unfair treatment Fiji receives from

other rugby union boards.

So, where was the player ratings column for Fiji? When was another international side ignored in that manner? Not just unfairness from the boards then, or was it a simple oversight?

Bob Browning, Bournemouth

Whilst Martin Samuel may have a point about the talent being extracted from our

football grounds with oil money, I prefer to see this as an opportunity Premier League clubs should grab with both hands.

Our clubs invest millions every year in academies only to see them spending billions in bringing in players from abroad. It's time our youngsters were given opportunities to prove themselves on the pitch instead of forever loaning them out to lower league

clubs. Martin Peters, Wayne Rooney and many other teenagers who were given such opportunities went on to flourishing careers.

Ike Garson, via email

Send your letters to:
The Sports Editor,
The Sunday Times,
1 London Bridge St,
London, SE1 9GF
email: sportletters
@sunday-times.co.uk

BUSINESS & MONEY



HOLLYWOOD
BLOW TO
UK'S FILM
WORKERS
PAGE 3



'OF COURSE YOU
CAN DO KARAOKE IN
YOUR MERCEDES!'
INTERVIEW
PAGE 5

SCRIMPING
TO PAY THE
SCHOOL FEES
MONEY
PAGE 9



Wilko closes in on rescue deal to save 8,000 jobs

Sam Chambers

Administrators to discount chain Wilko have won the backing of creditors for a rescue deal led by HMV tycoon Doug Putman that could save about 8,000 jobs. PwC is understood to have secured support from the Pension Protection Fund, an industry-backed lifeboat, as well as other creditors,

including major landlords and suppliers, for the deal. At the weekend administrators from PwC were investigating the financing behind the bid, which is mostly in the form of debt provided by Gordon Brothers, which specialises in lending to firms in financial distress. PwC is seeking to understand the terms attached to the debt and how

quickly it can be put in place. Sources said that, barring any late hiccups, a deal could be announced as soon as tomorrow, but added that the situation remained fluid. Putman's Sunrise Records, a Canadian music retailer, bought HMV in similar circumstances in 2019 and restored it to profit. The chain has almost 120 shops and is planning to reopen its

300
Number of Wilko shops deal could keep open

flagship on Oxford Street in London. Putman's family also owns Toys R Us in Canada. He is understood to be keen to save as many of Wilko's 400 shops as possible, although the final number could be closer to 300, depending on negotiations with landlords. Only days ago Putman flew back to Canada believing his deal was dead after the emergence of a bid for the

entire chain from private equity firm M2 Capital. Talks were revived after M2 failed to provide proof of funding. Wilko, which started as a hardware shop in Leicester in 1930, fell into administration last month amid accusations of mismanagement. Lisa Wilkinson, the chain's third-generation family owner, said: "If it couldn't be kept going it's because it couldn't be kept

going. It wasn't because anybody was sitting there twiddling their thumbs." Talks with the trustees of Wilko's pension fund, which is said to carry a deficit of about £50 million on a buyout basis, have centred around its £20 million worth of security over a number of Wilko's freehold properties.

Oliver Shah, page 7

Tata set for steel aid worth £500m

Jon Yeomans

Ministers are weighing up a £500 million injection into Tata Steel's plant in south Wales as part of an effort to safeguard the future of Britain's steel industry. Indian conglomerate Tata is in "advanced talks" for taxpayer help to convert its ageing blast furnaces at Port Talbot to newer, greener electric arc furnaces, Sky News reported. Tata would also commit £700 million of its own money to upgrade the site, which employs about 4,000 people and produces iron and steel for use in industries such as carmaking and wind turbine production. Tata, which also owns Jaguar Land Rover in the UK, has long warned that its blast furnaces will need to be replaced – a project that could cost up to £3 billion, according to some estimates. The company says that its customers are also demanding greener forms of steel production, which electric furnaces can provide. At the same time, the industry has complained of high energy costs in the UK making steelmaking unviable. Electric furnaces require fewer staff to operate over the long term. Up to 3,000 jobs could go in the course of Port Talbot's transition. The future of the UK's steel industry is a hot political topic, as the sector provides high-paying jobs in deprived areas. This year, cabinet ministers Grant Shapps and Michael Gove wrote to the chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, urging him to support the steel industry with taxpayer money in return for job guarantees. Domestic steel production is also seen as critical for national security. If a deal is confirmed, it would be the second big tranche of taxpayer money for Tata. In July, it won government funds to help build a £4 billion car battery "gigafactory" in the UK. The public money was undisclosed but could be up to £500 million. The company said: "Tata Steel is continuing to discuss with the UK government a framework for continuity and decarbonisation of steelmaking in the UK amid very challenging underlying business conditions given that several of its assets are approaching end of life." The Department for Business declined to comment.

Arm slashes valuation ahead of US flotation

William Turvill

British chip designer Arm is seeking a valuation of between \$50 billion (£40 billion) and \$55 billion when it floats in the US this month, a significant cut to the \$64 billion figure it achieved in a deal last month. The downgrade appears to be a big climbdown for its owner, the Japanese investment giant SoftBank, which acquired the 25 per cent of Arm it did not already control from its own Vision Fund for \$16.1 billion in August. The deal implied a value of \$64 billion. Analysts suggested the much lower price may hint at scepticism about SoftBank's chequered track record of investments. But Hermann Hauser, Arm co-founder, said \$50 billion-\$55 billion would not be a "bad outcome" given SoftBank acquired it for £24 billion when it was listed on the London Stock Exchange. Advisers to Arm, which is headquartered in Cambridge, are due to hold meetings with potential investors this week. Arm's decision to list in New York came as a blow to the LSE and the British government, which had tried to woo the company back to the UK market. The decision has prompted debate about what the UK can do to attract more high-profile listings. Last week Abcam, a Cambridge-based life sciences company on the Nasdaq, agreed a \$5.7 billion takeover from US conglomerate Danaher. Tech giants including Apple, Nvidia and Alphabet have agreed to invest in Arm when it floats, according to Reuters. SoftBank plans to sell about 10 per cent of Arm's shares through the float. Sources have stressed that by the time Arm lists, its valuation could rise beyond \$55 billion as investor talks advance. Arm was founded in 1990 as a joint venture between Acorn Computers,

Apple and VLSI Technology. It has close to 6,000 employees, about half based in the UK. Last year more than 30 billion Arm-designed chips went into devices such as mobile phones, tablets, cars and smart TVs. It counts some of the world's largest tech companies. SoftBank, led by Masayoshi Son, bought Arm off the London Stock Exchange for £24 billion in 2016. Last year SoftBank tried to sell the business to Nvidia, a rival US chipmaker, for \$40 billion. But the deal collapsed amid competition concerns from regulators. Advisers published the prospectus for Arm's float last month. The document showed that the company's revenues last year totalled \$2.68 billion, down 1 per cent, while net income dropped 22 per cent to \$524 million. It warned of Arm's exposure to China, which accounts for about a quarter of its revenues, amid tensions between Beijing and Washington. Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell, said the valuation would "look a bit odd" after last month's Vision Fund deal. "SoftBank is looking to re-establish its reputation for making good investments, not poor ones, after embarrassing ones like WeWork and FTX," he said, adding that a "discount" to Arm's value may "come from that scepticism". Michael Hewson, chief market analyst at CMC Markets, said the new figures looked "like a dose of reality" for SoftBank. "I did think that \$64 billion was a little bit rich." Hauser, who no longer holds a stake in Arm, said it would be "encouraging" to the UK tech sector when Arm "completes one of the biggest floats of this decade". He said he was disappointed Arm had not chosen to float in London but he hoped it may launch a secondary UK listing. Arm and SoftBank declined to comment.

KING RECLAIMS WEST END JEWEL

Jeremy King is to reopen Le Caprice, the London restaurant that was a mecca for famous names ranging from Princess Diana to Andy Warhol in its Eighties and Nineties heyday, writes Oliver Shah. King, 69, collected the keys to the property behind the Ritz hotel in St James's on Thursday and plans to bring it back to life in the new year. It is likely to trade under a new name because Richard Caring, the Annabel's tycoon who bought Caprice Holdings in 2005, wants to use Le Caprice for another venture. However, King has rehired its former maître d', Jesus Adorno, and the menu is expected to feature Le Caprice classics such as bang bang chicken, crispy duck salad and salmon fishcakes. The decor will stay largely unchanged. The deal represents an ongoing comeback for King, one of London's best-known restaurateurs, after he was thrown out of his Wolseley empire by Thai investor Minor Hotels last year. King is opening a restaurant on the north side of Hyde Park and is close to agreeing terms for an eye-catching third site in the West End. It also represents a homecoming. Le Caprice was where King made his name with business partner Chris Corbin. They took it over in 1981 and turned it into a celebrity hotspot. Le Caprice was name-checked in Jeffrey Archer's fateful 1986 alibi, and it was where he ate his first meal after being freed from jail for perjury. So glitzy was the clientele that King once saw Liz Taylor sit at a table the moment Laurence Olivier had vacated it. Caring closed Le Caprice during the coronavirus pandemic and did not reopen it. King negotiated the site's revival directly with the landlord.



Friends reunited: Jeremy King, right, pictured with Chris Corbin in 1985, when the pair first ran Le Caprice. The West End restaurant attracted stars such as Victoria Beckham and Claudia Schiffer.

Investigators hired to check out Russian gold mining lenders

Jon Yeomans

The administrators of a collapsed gold miner have hired private investigators to look into \$40 million-worth of claims lodged by Russian bondholders to ensure that they have not been sanctioned over the Ukraine war. Petropavlovsk, a former member of the FTSE 250, was co-founded by Peter Hambro, scion of the banking family, to mine gold in Russia. It collapsed last year after President Putin's full-scale invasion but has assets that Opus Restructuring, its administrator, is dividing up

among creditors. Opus is concerned that some claimants may be sanctioned individuals and has hired private detectives to perform "enhanced due diligence" on foreign bondholders seeking to get their money back. At least \$40 million has been put on hold pending investigations, a report to creditors said. Opus is already withholding \$670,000 claimed by an unnamed sanctioned individual. Another \$20 million has gone unclaimed and will be held on trust until at least next year. Petropavlovsk was

founded in 1994 and listed on the stock market in 2009. It came within a whisker of the FTSE 100, before being brought low by high debts and a slump in the gold price. The company went through years of boardroom upheaval that resulted in the exit of Hambro and, more recently, saw its interim chief executive forcing his way into the company's Russian headquarters after being locked out by staff. Opus said it had reviewed the ethical considerations of handling Petropavlovsk's administration but deemed it safe to proceed.

Jill Treanor

Senior City figures will call on chancellor Jeremy Hunt to meet regularly with a council of leading financial services executives and set out a long-term plan for the industry, which is suffering from a dearth of activity. While Hunt has set out reforms to boost the sector, which contributed 12 per cent of Britain's economic output last year, they feel that more planning is needed. The City has been struggling with a lack of activity, particularly since the war in Ukraine reduced

investor appetite for risk. The demand this week for greater engagement with Hunt comes from the City of London Corporation local authority. It is also calling for the government to better co-ordinate its schemes to encourage investment, sharpen its approach to digital transformation, scale up support for green investments and boost international trade. The review was led by Lord Mayor Nicholas Lyons and Chris Hayward, of the corporation, with input from Schroders, JP Morgan, EY, KPMG and Barclays.

John Lewis delays key £150m plan to redevelop flagship store

Sam Chambers

John Lewis's effort to raise £150 million by selling almost half of its flagship store has been delayed amid turmoil in the commercial property sector. Last year, John Lewis, chaired by Dame Sharon White, picked a joint venture between the developer Hines and Korea National Pension Service as preferred bidder for a project to convert the upper floors of the building in Oxford Street, London, into offices. The bidders were understood to be willing to pay £150 million, with the

floors touted as having an eventual value of up to £750 million once developed into high-spec offices. But rising interest rates and falling property prices have derailed the deal. John Lewis, which declined to comment, is believed to remain in contact with Hines and other developers over the project, which is thought to have been delayed rather than abandoned. Developers have grown wary of committing to major projects around Oxford Street after Michael Gove, the housing secretary, blocked

Marks & Spencer's attempts to demolish and rebuild its Oxford Street store. M&S filed a legal challenge against the decision last week. A source close to John Lewis said its scheme was not comparable as it was a conversion, not a rebuild. Oxford Street, however, is poised for a much-needed boost. Pocket Planet, an new attraction featuring large, scale model versions of British landmarks, has agreed to rent a large vacant shop just across the road from the M&S store at the centre of the planning row.

As Rishi Sunak rolls back EU environmental rules to meet housing targets, developers warn that more radical reform is needed. *Jon Yeomans* reports

On the edge of the South Downs in East Sussex, within spitting distance of the sea, sits the Skylarks development of 45 plush new homes. The half-finished estate is the latest project by Brookworth Homes, which builds about 80 houses a year. It hopes to tempt well-heeled families, retirees and professionals from nearby Brighton, which is bursting at the seams.

“There’s a gap in the market for people who want quality,” said Justin Barnes, chairman of Brookworth. He’s clear that he doesn’t want to build the identikit homes of his rivals. His houses in Rottingdean promise more space and extra touches, such as a warm water tap outside for hosing down the family dog.

It’s not easy being a small housebuilder. Barnes can reel off a list of challenges from the shortage of labour to the soaring cost of materials. He saves his biggest gripes for the planning system. Another of his developments, in Ashford, Kent, has been mothballed because it may breach “nutrient neutrality rules”.

That project may now see the light of day. Last week Rishi Sunak announced he would amend the forthcoming levelling-up bill to scrap rules on nutrient neutrality – a piece of EU-inherited law designed to ensure new housing developments do not result in more untreated sewage entering our rivers.

Housebuilders had blamed these rules for holding up the development of 100,000 new homes nationwide. So their repeal will be a big victory for the industry’s lobbying – one that could unlock projects that had been frozen by what critics considered a heavy-handed application of the law.

Before the next election, Sunak is keen to show he is addressing Britain’s chronic shortage of new homes. But he has provoked furious condemnation from environmental groups and even his own voters – for whom the health of our rivers has become a hot topic amid a slew of headlines about sewage discharges and water company failings.

The government’s watchdog – the Office for Environmental Protection – said the move would weaken environmental law.

The RSPB called ministers “liars” on social media, before apologising. Sunak’s move has reignited the blame game over who is responsible for the state of our

waterways. But will it deliver more homes? And if not, how can Britain solve the housebuilding conundrum?

All sides in the debate concede that more homes are needed. The government has set a target of 300,000 a year, but last year proposed watering down requirements that make it mandatory for local authorities to meet this goal.

Last year new home completions hit 233,000 but housebuilders have warned they would deliver only 150,000 this year.

This is because of nutrient neutrality rules, but also because the government is pushing through changes to development rules in the levelling-up bill. While the bill works its way through parliament, developers say councils are sitting on their hands and freezing new projects.

Turmoil in the mortgage market due to higher interest rates has shut out many first-time buyers. Amid the resulting fall in demand, firms such as Barratt, which reports results this week, have indicated they will protect their bottom line by building fewer homes. Investors have been selling shares in the sector to the extent that one of the biggest listed names, Persimmon, lost its FTSE 100 status last week.

150,000

The number of new homes that developers say they will build this year

300,000

The government’s target for how many new homes it wants building each year

Solving Britain’s building puzzle

Even the 300,000-a-year goal has been questioned. This year the Centre for Cities think tank suggested that Britain’s broken planning system meant that in the past 50 years the UK was missing four million homes it needed to meet population growth. The UK population is expected to hit 72 million by 2045, from 67 million now.

The evidence suggests the housing shortage is meaning more people of all ages are having to share homes. Last year official figures indicated that 1.2 million households were on waiting lists for social housing.

And then there’s the impact on GDP: “Disposable incomes are depressed by really high housing costs,” said Anthony Breach of the Centre for Cities.

“It results in lower tax revenue, fewer construction jobs, less revenue for public services. There’s a whole bunch of things that are made harder because we make it very difficult to build in this country.”

Unsurprisingly, that is a sentiment that is shared by the building industry, which has long had nutrient neutrality in its sights.

The nutrients in question are principally phosphates and nitrates, which cause algae to bloom and stifle the oxygen in the water, harming fish. Agriculture is generally considered the biggest

contributor because of fertilisers and effluent from livestock, although new housing estates do contribute. Developers have an automatic right to connect their new homes to the sewage system, but they say the water companies do not invest enough to make that happen safely.

Sunak’s reforms will do away with a requirement for housebuilders to ensure they are not adding nutrients to rivers. Craig Bennett, chief executive of The Wildlife Trusts, was not afraid to echo the RSPB’s sentiment: “It is a very clear categorical case of the government having lied to parliament and to the British public.”

“They had consistently promised that they will maintain and uphold environmental protections post-Brexit.”

Campaigners are aghast at the wording of the amendment to the levelling-up bill, which orders local authorities to wave through developments even when there is evidence they could pump more nutrients into rivers.

“We all want evidence-based policy – this is literally ‘ignore-the-evidence’ policy,” said Gabriel Connor-Streich, chief executive of advisory firm Greenshank Environmental.

Fear of antagonising the planners

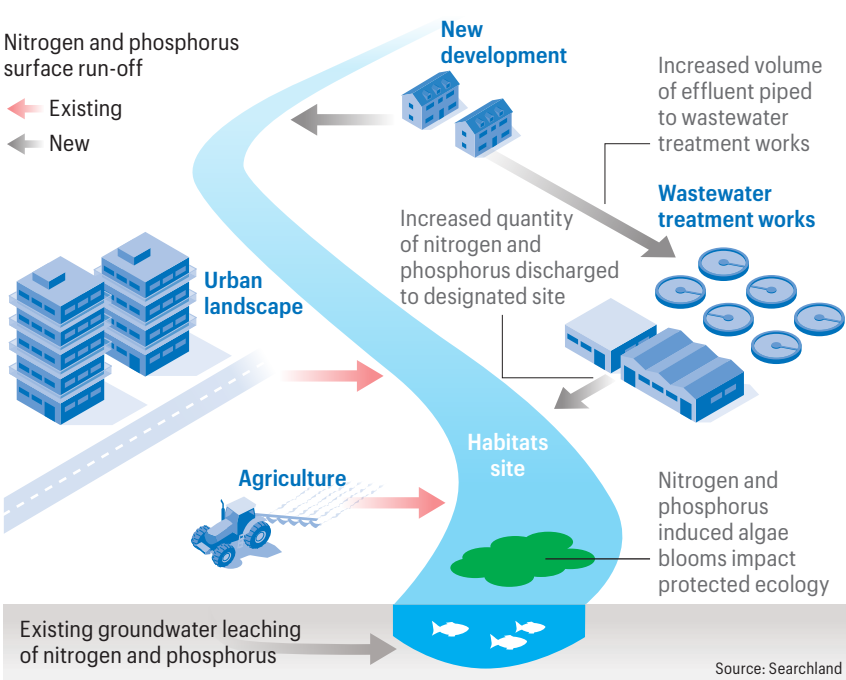
The issue of river health is just one front in the battle to fix the pipeline of new homes. The finger of blame tends to turn on the state of planning departments, which have suffered big cuts over the past decade, as well as the failure to take a joined-up approach to housing and infrastructure.

The managing director of one local housebuilder, who did not wish to be named for fear of antagonising planners, cited a development of 60 homes that took five years to get its planning permissions then stalled because of a delay in the council installing a traffic light junction a mile away.

Another developer recalled a project that took “16 months to approve with 95 separate drawings, five planning officers,

“One development took 16 months to approve and a lot of expletives

HOW NUTRIENTS SEEP INTO RIVERS



Richard Harpin

Bosses will benefit if they help their workers to stay well



There were a few too many cocktails and unnecessary desserts, but that’s the summer holidays for you. Now it’s back to work and back on the treadmill. A few pounds heavier, September tends to be when we reprioritise our health – but why just our own?

Business leaders need to help shape a healthier nation, encouraging people to adopt better habits, make more informed decisions and look after themselves better. There’s a moral and financial imperative for doing so.

When I was born, the average life expectancy in Britain was 72, the 10th-highest in the world. It’s now 82 but we’re ranked 29th, with about six million people of working age out of the jobs market due to health issues.

Last week, a new study revealed that British men are twice as likely as women



UK Government

MADE IN THE UK SOLD TO THE WORLD



“International demand has strengthened growth for our architectural practice.”
Simone de Gale Architects

Get free help to find new international customers and grow your business.

Visit [great.gov.uk](https://www.great.gov.uk)



GREAT
BRITAIN & NORTHERN IRELAND

ILLUSTRATION: PETE BAKER



Deeley Group, said her firm had 300 homes stalled because councils had not progressed the “local plans” that were supposed to be the blueprints for development.

“We want to deliver the housing that’s needed, but we’re all stuck,” she said. She called for “clarity” in the process. “You can’t have so much variation in one small country.”

Michael Gove, the housing secretary, announced this summer that he would send in crack teams of planning experts to unblock development in some areas. He also outlined plans to regenerate 20 towns and cities and push for denser developments.

But reforms could go further. The UK could move away from its discretionary, case-by-case planning system and embrace a “zoning” approach favoured by most other countries, according to Breach. Under this system, areas are designated for residential, industrial and so on. Projects in these zones would automatically get a green light for development as long as they tick all the boxes.

“It would mean a shift in the control that local authorities have over individual applications,” Breach said. “But I think there is a strong consensus now that the planning system is responsible for why Britain’s housing crisis is so bad.”

Back in Rottingdean, Justin Barnes of Brookworth Home is quietly confident that upheaval in the housing market won’t upset demand for his properties – despite Nationwide reporting a 5.3 per cent drop in house prices last week.

“We opened our show home on August bank holiday and we had 50 people round,” he said.

“Some tourists, some dog walkers, some people being nosy. But we think we’ll have a dozen or so who’ll come back for another look. That’s pretty good.”

to suffer heart attacks. Little wonder that in 2022, there were more working days lost to ill-health than ever – 186 million.

Further, a report last year from the professional services firm Deloitte highlighted the financial impact on businesses of health-related issues such as absenteeism, with costs peaking at £56 billion. By supporting employees to look after their health and get more exercise, businesses could generate a return of about £5 for every pound invested.

When a workforce is more engaged, health really does become wealth. So leaders should be strategic in making a priority of wellbeing, creating a culture in which people feel supported and supportive.

One reason for our high staff retention at both Checkatrade and HomeServe is our joined-up approach to wellbeing. We offer gym membership, discounts on

fitness equipment, fully funded counselling, and a summer-hours programme to promote a better work-life balance. That’s on top of all the expected healthcare benefits.

This kind of investment can also have profound benefits for society. Think of how menopausal women are now looked after rather than stigmatised in the workplace.

But there’s so much more we can do. A post-Covid report by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development suggested that only 51 per cent of employees thought companies had an effective wellbeing strategy in place. Once, new recruits focused on salary and holiday entitlement; now it’s about healthcare provision.

Surveys abound to find Britain’s healthiest workplace and, consequently, top-ranked businesses are better able to attract and retain the best millennials

and Gen Zers. By influencing their staff to take better care of themselves, businesses can share some of the burden with our health professionals. They can go further, too – a recently launched scheme to encourage private companies to build 160 community diagnostic centres, and run them in collaboration with the NHS, is just such an idea.

Which brings me to the other reason why, as a growth-fixated entrepreneur, I believe that health has to be a priority. The NHS is a precious asset but its greatest strength is to treat us when we’re sick. Business leaders should create and build businesses with technologies and services that help people avoid getting ill in the first place. The opportunities are huge.

For instance, Tim Spector’s ZOE healthcare app – which was adapted to be a Covid symptom tracker – has reverted to its original purpose of using

“Once, new recruits focused on salary, now it’s about healthcare

Bluetooth technology to create personalised nutrition programmes. It is now valued at £200 million.

I have invested my own money in a low-cost chain of gyms, Synergym, expanding them from 13 outlets in 2019 to 69 today, fuelled by a desire to encourage more active lifestyles in an affordable way.

This is more than a health issue, it’s a leadership one, and four key strategies for people running businesses spring to mind:

- Organisations promoting wellness always see a significant return on investment. Add benefits in an iterative way – emotional, physical, social, financial, intellectual, occupational and environmental – and listen to your teams. Analyse what works and use data to improve the programme.
- Consider how to help others contribute – for instance, influencing

supply-chain partners to improve their impact on society.

- As a leader, a fitness coach could be as important as a business coach. Not just because it raises your performance, but as role models, leaders influence others to adopt healthier habits.
- We must invest in firms that are focused on improving the health of the nation. For instance, there is huge scope to develop a vitamins industry that targets specific health conditions rather than overall health. New firms such as Juvia, which looks at gut health, are responding to the needs of a growing population.

As for me, I’ve got another triathlon to train for and another birthday cake to devour. I’ll let you decide which one I’m least looking forward to.

Richard Harpin is founder and chairman of HomeServe & Growth Partner

I only got four GCSEs but my car loans business is making £20m



Hannah Prevett
Deputy Editor,
Times Enterprise Network

Jim Wilkinson’s memories of the birth of his son, Jimmy, now 13, are somewhat hazy. One minute he was standing next to his wife, Kate, as she was prepped for an emergency caesarean; the next, he was in a side room and being offered tea.

He had fainted, and after rushing to see Kate, he learnt that Jimmy had been taken to special care. “I saw him there with all the tubes and everything,” said Wilkinson, now 42. Jimmy was still there a month later when they learnt he had Prader-Willi Syndrome, which leads to an excessive appetite and behavioural challenges.

“It was a blessing to find out when he was so young, because most people don’t find out until children are three or four, when they’re eating loads of food,” said Wilkinson.

However, he was juggling caring for another “baby” – Zuto, a car finance marketplace he had recently set up with friend Ryan Dignan, which was at a critical point.

“I wanted to spend as much time as I could with Jimmy, but even though we had 50 staff by this point, it was still Ryan and me driving everything. So I’d work next to the incubator.”

Jimmy and Zuto are both thriving teenagers now. Jimmy attends a specialist school, which he “loves”, and Zuto is a 450-employee firm based in Manchester.

Since securing a £17 million investment from Scottish Equity Partners (SEP) in 2014, it has gone from strength to strength and, in the year to June 2022, recorded sales of

£41.5 million and a pre-tax profit of £19.4 million.

It’s all the more impressive given Wilkinson’s lack of formal education or training. The son of a dairy farmer and a florist, he grew up wanting to be a footballer, and after passing just four GCSEs, he became an apprentice at Rochdale AFC on £42 a week.

It wasn’t quite what he had hoped for. “I think you learn how not to lead people through football,” he said. “It’s a lot of shouting, putting fear into people.”

It did, however, teach him resilience – something he learnt more about when he was released by the club after two years. “That gives you a real grounding in how to deal with failure.”

He went on to take a job in a Warrington call centre, where he met Dignan – they quickly “hit it off” and began discussing going into business together. Dignan is from a family of car dealers, which sparked the idea for Car Loan 4U, founded in 2006 and rebranded as Zuto in 2015, after the pair became dismayed by the “unfairness” of car financing.

“The dealer could move the interest rate up or down,

“We were just two young lads saying we were going to challenge the market

JAMES SPEAKMAN FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES



Jim Wilkinson wants to make a change in society

and the higher the rate, the more commission a dealer would earn,” said Wilkinson.

They decided to launch an online credit broker using algorithms to match customers’ budgets to the best loan deal. The idea was that this would be more transparent and fair than the status quo. The trouble was, Wilkinson admitted, they didn’t have a clue what they were doing. “You’re so fearless when you’re young that you do it anyway.”

They financed the start-up by taking out £70,000 on personal credit cards and in personal loans. “If it had all gone wrong, we’d still be paying that off now,” laughed Wilkinson.

Despite their lack of business nous, they secured regulatory approval from the Financial Services Authority, and began trading in 2007 with one lender, British Credit Trust, since dissolved. A large chunk of their time was spent trying to persuade other lenders to sign up, but it was a tough sell initially, said Wilkinson.

“Lenders thought we were crazy as car finance was all taking place in bricks and mortar at point of sale. Then these two young lads were saying we were going to challenge this market.”

If lenders took some convincing, borrowers were ready for change. “We put our last £5,000 on search engine advertising and we

HIGH FIVE

My hero ... my wife, Kate. We’ve grown the business and our family together. The resilience that Kate has shown, first through Jimmy being born and then fighting for him to get into schools, is just amazing.

My best decision ... to rebrand from Car Loan 4U to Zuto in 2015. People told me it was a huge risk and we might lose search-engine rankings – and it did cause some pain for 18 months. But it was the best thing we ever did.

My worst decision ... After we raised the money, I had a bit of pressure from people around me to start changing the team and hire people from bigger companies. It meant that some of the early team members left, or it didn’t work out because of all the new ideas coming in.

Funniest moment ... When we signed the private equity deal, we were so excited to get to the pub, where we’d gathered the whole team to celebrate. Ryan is obsessed with cars and has spent his life tinkering with them. That day, unfortunately, we were travelling back in one of his cars and it broke down, so we celebrated the biggest deal in our early career on the hard shoulder waiting for a breakdown truck.

Best business tip ... Always operate with integrity, even when people aren’t watching.

arrived at 4am the next day to log in and check if people had applied – we had 25 applications.”

The following year, he said, the duo had to decide whether this was a “lifestyle business” – there just to give them a nice living – or something bigger. They opted for the latter, shifting to chase growth over profits. But the risks of running a business without cash reserves – as they had reinvested everything they’d made in marketing – began to hit home as they took on staff.

“A lot of Zutonites have families and mortgages, and we were taking risks every month to really accelerate growth ... And it was getting a bit concerning.”

They brought in SEP to help, and it now owns 50 per cent, with Wilkinson and Dignan retaining 40 per cent.

After Jimmy’s birth in 2010, Wilkinson also became more focused on “making a difference” – not just in the car finance industry, but also in his local community. He is now president of the Forever Manchester charity, and in 2022, Zuto became one of the first fintechs in the UK to become a B Corp – a business that meets certain ethical standards.

“After Jimmy was born ... that’s when I shifted from just being a growth machine, trying to make loads of money, to [thinking] we can make a bigger difference.”

Lights, camera, inaction as strikes hit UK workers

William Turvill

Katie Dadswell broke into Britain’s film-making industry four years ago after joining a traineeship scheme.

For her first job, she worked on *The Father*, a film starring Olivia Coleman and Anthony Hopkins.

“That first job made me so excited to be in the industry,” said Dadswell, who studied graphic design at university and has established herself as a drafts person, drawing up technical designs for sets that appear in films.

“I didn’t know what I wanted to do, but I knew I wanted to do something art-related,” she said. “There were all these jobs that I didn’t know existed. I went in and I realised I could be making things, I could be designing things, I could be an upholsterer – there were all these amazing jobs that I never knew existed. It’s an amazing industry.”

Dadswell is one of about 66,000 people across Britain who have forged a career in film-making. Buoyed by tax relief incentives introduced by George Osborne in 2015, when he was chancellor, the UK has become an attractive destination for Hollywood studios and streamers to

make films and TV series. This has created a major industry in the UK. But this summer, tens of thousands of production workers have been left idle during an ordinarily busy season. Dadswell, 27, has been out of work since early June.

The cause stems from a dispute more than 5,000 miles away in Hollywood, where actors and writers have been on strike to seek better pay and conditions, and reassurances from companies such as Disney and Netflix that they will not be replaced by AI.

The strikes have brought UK film sets to a standstill because most Hollywood productions here are made with American actors who are refusing to work. The standstill has had a knock-on effect across the industry, from special effects – an industry largely based in London – to post-production and sound engineering.

A survey of 4,000 members of the Bectu broadcasting industry union on Friday found that 80 per cent had been affected, while three-quarters were not working. That would chime with industry workers’ claims that anywhere between 25,000 and 50,000 are out of

work. For Dadswell, the strikes could hardly have come at a worse time.

She and her partner, Nick Milligan, who works as a camera assistant, recently bought a flat in north London. While Milligan has found some work, including on a commercial shoot, Dadswell is doing shifts in a café.

With the Hollywood strikes showing little sign of being resolved, they face uncertain months. “It’s a little bit scary,” Dadswell said.

The scale of job losses across the UK is hard to quantify because workers tend to be freelance and have to sign confidentiality deals when they start jobs. But more than ten major UK projects have been paused, including *Deadpool 3*, *Wicked* and a live-action version of *How To*

Katie Dadswell and Nick Milligan have lost work



Train Your Dragon. At least 1,000 people would be working on each, industry sources said. In some instances, a small amount of work, not involving American actors, has been available.

Ian Ogden, 35, works in the film industry as a grip, moving cameras around during shoots. Since being stood down from a

Hollywood film in July, he has found only “drips and drabs” of work, including on adverts. “I’ve been able to pay my bills for September, but I’ve not been able to find enough for our grocery budget,” said the father of two toddlers. “The situation is very much hand-to-mouth.”

Ogden and his fiancée are looking at cutting back on the £1,400-a-month nursery fees for their two-year-old. This would mean that she would have to stop working as a freelance hairdresser.

“I’ve been pretty busy through my

whole career,” said Ogden, who can earn between £400 and £500 a day, “but this has shown me how fragile the industry is.”

Joe Halford, a 45-year-old health and safety adviser in the special effects sector, has been working about two days a week over the summer but expects this to end soon.

“Everything’s cancelled,” said Halford, who lives in Hertfordshire and has two young children.

“We did go on a family holiday to Turkey because it was already booked but we didn’t leave the hotel. It was all-inclusive and we knew it would be a last hurrah.”

Alex Westcott, 36, a mother of two young children who designs outdoor filming sets, has not worked for eight weeks. “Nothing’s going on,” she said. “I can’t pay the mortgage, I can’t take the kids out.” She and her husband have had to cut down on food shopping and live on “three basic main meals with nothing in between”.

“This film industry – they’re ruining people’s lives,” she said. “People will lose their homes, people will have to go to food banks.”

“I don’t think anyone really realises how bad it actually is.”



A grim visual metaphor unfolded at the checkout of Wilko in Sutton, south London, on Friday afternoon. A middle-aged woman lugged four life-size plastic skeletons to the till, paid for them and then unceremoniously stuffed them into bin bags.

The scene, in many ways, summed up the sad situation Wilko and its 12,500 staff have found themselves in after the family-owned discounter crashed into administration last month. Yet the sight of tills ringing as the chain stands at death's door is a welcome one for Hilco, the high street's pre-eminent undertaker, which is taking a cut on each one of those skeletons.

Hilco has carved out a lucrative niche feeding on high street distress. The firm, co-founded and chaired by the Northern Irishman Paul McGowan, scours the market for struggling businesses and seeks to extract a return from either buying them outright, acting as a lender of last resort or, when they go bust, liquidating them – selling the stock for a commission.

Sometimes it manages to do all three.

Wilko is turning into a classic Hilco investment. Within days of Wilko going bust, the administrators from PwC appointed Hilco to run the trading operations across its 400 shops. Hilco put itself in the box seat for the role by lending £40 million to Wilko in the lead-up to its collapse, establishing itself as a top-ranking creditor and gaining a deep understanding of the discounter's operations.

Making a killing from disaster

Hilco's ability to extract fees from both sides when a company collapses raises troubling questions, *Sam Chambers* reports

£40m

Lent by Hilco to Wilko in the lead-up to its collapse, establishing the firm as a top-ranking creditor

12,500

Wilko staff at risk after the chain collapsed into administration

provided a £25 million loan facility to struggling fashion retailer Superdry.

While there is no suggestion of any unlawful behaviour, Hilco's ability to extract fees from both sides of Wilko's collapse – through interest on loans before it went under and fees from any liquidation – raises important questions over conflicts of interest and the robustness of insolvency regulations.

McGowan was brought up in Belfast during the Troubles, before going on to run the UK arm of American women-swear brand Leslie Fay. When it pulled out of Britain in 1996, McGowan learnt the nuts and bolts of winding down a retailer. In 1999, he teamed up with former Harrods executive Paul Taylor and persuaded Hilco, then an America-

focused investment firm, to set up a joint venture in the UK, specialising in liquidations. It became a spectacular success and these days McGowan is executive chairman, living in the tax haven of Monaco, near his long-term associate Sir Philip Green.

In 2005, Hilco got the City's attention with a lucrative and controversial foray into the moribund department store chain Alders. It bought £93 million of the chain's debt for just £27.6 million, before putting the business into administration a week later, making tens of millions of pounds in profit from property sales and fees from the administrators as thousands of staff lost their jobs. The pension scheme was bailed out by the industry-backed Pension Protection Fund.

While McGowan retains a keen interest in Hilco's business, the day-to-day operation is run by Henry Foster, a qualified accountant, who is known as a professional operator keen on improving Hilco's reputation.

For all the controversy that follows Hilco, few would dispute that nobody runs a closing-down sale more clinically. Shoppers are lured into the Sutton branch of Wilko with huge orange signs reading "Everything Must Go!" Inside, some areas have been stripped bare.

Hilco will often seek to keep shelves full by buying so-called augmentation stock from other sources to keep the shoppers coming in. While bargain hunters may be getting great deals, suppliers are left exposed when a business goes bust. They face the risk of receiving deri-

sory sums for goods already shipped or made.

Take Asif Moyeen. His firm Fareast Knitting had supplied Scottish fashion retailer M&Co from his factory in Bangladesh for 22 years. In early December, Moyeen shipped 50,000 ladies' tops, worth \$162,849, only to find out days later that M&Co had gone bust.

With the shipment stuck 5,000 miles away in a British port, Moyeen received a take-it-or-leave-it offer from Hilco's Jaimin Shah. Hilco, which lent to M&Co before being appointed as the chain's liquidator, offered \$48,855 for the tops. Moyeen regarded the offer as an insult but felt he had no choice but to accept.

The chaotic nature of the Wilko insolvency, in which decisions had to be taken rapidly, helped Hilco get appointed to run the closing-down sale. PwC did not carry out a tender process, relying simply on its knowledge of market commission rates to inform negotiations with Hilco.

PwC said: "Our decisions as administrators are driven by our statutory duties including to achieve the best outcome for creditors as a whole. Crucially, stock agents report to the administrators – as administrators we are responsible for all decision-making in pursuit of our statutory duties." Hilco declined to comment.

Critics of Hilco's model of operating as a secured creditor and liquidation house say the prospect of a lucrative liquidation puts its economic incentives at odds with unsecured creditors, not to mention employees.

The opacity of the administration process, and the fact an administrator is duty-bound to act in the interest of creditors, gives rise to suspicions Hilco could exercise influence over whether a firm such as Wilko is sold or liquidated.

Sources close to PwC and Hilco strongly deny this, arguing Hilco's work in keeping the shops trading is carried out partly to increase the chances of a sale. Hilco has provided additional funding to allow PwC the time to find a buyer.

Given that Hilco is regarded as the best of only four liquidation houses in the UK, it ends up getting repeat business from insolvency practitioners, creating a sense of cosiness to outside observers. Last year, PwC appointed Hilco to liquidate Cath Kidston's 60 shops after it collapsed following nine months under Hilco's ownership. A source close to PwC said it worked with all liquidation firms and did not give Hilco preferential treatment.

Not everybody is convinced. "If you have a system that is dysfunctional enough to allow all sorts of conflicts of interest then the entrepreneurial and financial community will find a way of occupying that space," retail consultant Richard Hyman said. "The system absolutely stinks."

Oliver Shah, Page 7

SPONSORED CONTENT

ACHIEVE YOUR PERSONNEL BEST

Hard-working HR professionals are busier than ever. Luckily, streamlining operations and futureproofing bustling businesses is now easier than ever, too...

What makes a great company? Is it a brilliant business concept, exceptional customer service or the ability to adapt to customers' ever-shifting needs? It is, of course, all of these things, but the beating heart of every thriving organisation is its people.

Personio knows all about that. Its unique, holistic human resources software streamlines every HR process, from onboarding, payroll and recruiting to performance reviews and managing absences. All of which frees up time to focus on strategy and big ideas.

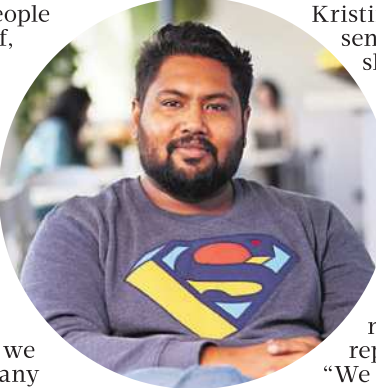
Since Personio's launch in 2015, its software has helped over 10,000 HR teams across Europe eliminate admin, become more efficient and grow revenue.

Sarah Thomas, people lead at Mindful Chef, knew that the company's recipe box product was successful but she needed a way to match the brand's ethos of mindfulness and express it in how the company went about managing its own people.

"Before Personio, we were working on many different spreadsheets, different reports and trying to do manual contracts and editing that way," explains Sarah.

"A lot of other HR tools are really great at engagement and performance but don't have a recruitment function," she adds. "Or they are really good at payroll but they don't have anything to do with performance. Personio offered a really good balance of everything we needed."

Mindful Chef was able to swiftly build an in-house recruiting team and an efficient yet candidate-focused recruiting process. Personio's automation and personalisation tools also helped with retention: HR were automatically reminded of birthdays and anniversaries,



as well as more business-focused milestones such as probationary periods. Sarah describes this function as a "lifesaver", which allowed Mindful Chef to maintain that personal touch. "I wouldn't be able to do any of the more added-value things as a business partner without the automation that Personio provides," she says.

Her team uses it every day. "We wake up in the morning and go on Personio. It is not one static product; it is evolving and becoming even better every day."

Another business making the most of Personio's HR software is Lush. The dynamic bath, body and skincare brand creates handmade, ethically sourced, low-waste products. Diversity is highly valued within the organisation.

Kristin Brandt, Lush's senior HR manager, says she was looking for a HR solution that would help reduce manual tasks and empower people.

"There were a lot of steps and, overall, HR information was only accessible through our monthly payroll report," she explains. "We looked for a system that could include time tracking, absence management, recruiting, analytics... all of those important things in one."

One of her favourite aspects of Personio is the templates feature, which streamlines documents, makes it easier to share policies and send out employment contracts. Then there's recruiting: "Before, we did recruiting very manually and often very ad hoc – nowadays, we can direct applicants to Personio and we can use that data to support shops with recruitment," says Kristin.

It's a win-win. Each employee uses the system, which supports Lush's culture: "Using Personio, we decided to offer everyone the opportunity to define their pronouns. This way, people know



how to address other employees in a way that is comfortable for them. "All employees can use the handy employee self-service tool. They request absences, keep in contact with managers and use public profiles to check in with colleagues," explains Kristin.

Another Personio adopter is Phorest, which creates software used by more than 150,000 hair, beauty and clinic professionals worldwide to grow their businesses. "Before Personio, HR was definitely a bit more chaotic," laughs Alex Quinn, head of people operations at Phorest.

The feature that the company uses the most? It is probably everyone's favourite HR process – booking holidays. It's also a personal favourite of Alex's: "I love it. Just the fact that people can book their holidays without having to log onto a different app is super useful.

I LOVE HOW EASY IT IS TO BOOK HOLIDAYS

It doesn't take a lot of time out of their day and it is really seamless. It's something that we use every day here at Phorest."

Hospitality brand Premier Inn is the UK's largest hotel brand, with hotels across the UK and beyond, including Germany and the Middle East. Premier Inn HR manager Cristina Antoniu was thrilled to find Personio already in place when the chain took over 13 existing hotels and a further six under construction from a competitor in Germany. The hotel merger turned into an HR transformation.

She had used Personio before and it had left a lasting impression. It made complete sense to extend it to the remaining Premier Inn hotels in Germany. "I was very excited to discover all the new features from Personio and a few months later we successfully implemented this super useful system for all

of our hotels," says Cristina.

Data-driven cancer diagnostics company, Cyted, based in Cambridge, was thrilled to have Personio on its books to help with the company's rapid growth. When looking for a software solution, head of people, Jack Wilson, wanted time-efficient processes and better cost control. "Personio helps us to be a sustainable business and create a good example of healthy efficiency," says Jack. "I think that's what the team should be about."

The People Operating System

To explore how Personio can elevate your business, visit personio.com

Mercedes has changed its tune

Mercedes-Benz is “going for value over volume”, Ola Kallenius says

Chairman Ola Kallenius is cutting the range of models, going electric and installing in-car karaoke

INTERVIEW
JOHN ARLIDGE



It's not every day you get to drive a £3 million car – especially one you've created. It's mid-morning on a blustery day on the south coast and Ola Kallenius eases his 6ft 3-inch frame into the Mercedes McLaren SLR Stirling Moss. He developed the homage to Moss's triumphant Mille Miglia endurance car when he was seconded from Stuttgart to McLaren in Woking and is about to drive it up the famed hill climb at Goodwood House. Not as fast as he would like, though. “That first corner is sharp,” he sighs.

Speed matters to Kallenius. Mercedes-Benz, which invented the motor car 137 years ago, is rushing to retool itself for the very different 137 years ahead. “We have to reinvent the original invention. I'm working for a start-up, albeit one that's more than a century old,” he jokes.

Swedish-born Kallenius, the first non-German to be handed the keys to the three-pointed star, has the revolutionary zeal of a Silicon Valley tech bro. He is doing something that no boss of a major global luxury car marque has done before: he is cutting the number of models he makes, even if it means selling fewer cars. “We will trim the portfolio,” he says.

The number of cheaper Mercedes models will almost halve because “the road forward is not to become a volume maker. It's not what the brand is about.” There will be fewer coupés and convertibles, such as the iconic SL Gullwing, because they do not appeal to consumers in Mercedes' key market, China. However, pinnacle products such as the S-Class limousine, SUVs and sporty AMG models will benefit from huge investment in new technology.

The boxy G-Class SUV will remain largely unchanged, “because it's a religion in its own right”, but what about the C and E-Class estate cars loved by many? There has been speculation that they will be axed – following Volvo's lead; the Swedish carmaker no longer sells estate cars in Britain. “We are just launching the next-generation E-Class estate. That's not the last estate we will launch,” says Kallenius. Middle-class families, rejoice!

Overall, the model line-up is likely to shrink from about 50 today to about 40 over the next decade.

Kallenius thinks Mercedes has drifted too far downmarket and must “focus on

pioneering innovation and timeless beauty that we are known for”. He reckons edgy new models penned by the chief designer Gorden Wagener are the new icons – that will appeal to younger customers. “This is not your father's or mother's car – it's the son's or daughter's car.” His priority now is investing £50 billion “to create an innovation revolution”. That's partly about going electric – a “must” for all carmakers as governments begin to phase in bans on the sale of petrol and diesel-powered cars. Almost every Mercedes comes with an electric power option, either fully electric or hybrid. Yet models run wholly or partly on batteries still account for less than one-fifth of Mercedes' sales. That number should increase in the run-up to 2030, when all the company's models will be pure electric vehicles (EVs) “should the market be ready for that”.

To prepare the ground, Kallenius is spending almost €1 billion (£850 million) creating a 10,000-strong network of high-power roadside chargers worldwide. The company has also struck an agreement with a mining outfit in Canada, Rock Tech, to guarantee supplies of lithium – “because if we look at the amount of lithium that we're going to need for batteries, it's mind boggling”. Mercedes aims to “decarbonise the whole value chain” by 2039.

Kallenius's tech revolution will also create cabins that look more like homes than cars. “We're entering an era where more driving will be autonomous. That means interiors are even more important.” New sound systems, huge TV screens, changing light settings and vibrating seats will deliver “Albert Hall quality audio” and “rock concert or movie theatre atmosphere”, he promises. There will also be Zoom calls, gaming and karaoke. Karaoke? In a Merc? What would Carl Benz, the inventor of the car, say? “When the machine drives you, you get back the most valuable gift of all: time. What do many of our customers in China want to do? They want karaoke. My wife, Sabine, likes to sing and wants it, too.” China accounts for 37 per cent of Mercedes' sales, twice as much as the US and three times as much as Germany.

Fine, but isn't he forgetting the petrolhead who wants a blood 'n' guts driving experience? “For the person who wants pure performance – just you, the machine and the road – the answer is very simple: AMG [the badge that adorns the high-performance versions of Mercedes cars].”

Kallenius should know – he used to run AMG. After joining Mercedes in 1993 as a management trainee, he was promoted to work on the SLR at McLaren's headquarters in Woking. He moved on to run the powertrain (engines) division of the Mercedes Formula One team, then became chief executive of AMG. He joined Mercedes' executive board in 2013 and took over the sales division. He succeeded Dieter Zetsche as the chairman of the board of management in 2019.



THE LIFE OF OLA KALLENIUS

Born: June 11, 1969
Status: married to Sabine. Three sons
School: Danderyd grammar school, near Stockholm
University: Stockholm School of Economics (masters in finance and accounting)
First job: washing dishes in a restaurant
Pay: €6.1 million
Homes: Stuttgart and Malmö
Car: Mercedes EQS 580
Book: Robert Harris's historical works
Drink: beer
Film: *The Godfather*
Music: oldies – 1980s, 1990s, 2000s
Gadget: “Does a high-tech Mercedes qualify?”
Watch: IWC Portofino
Charity: “Last year, we auctioned one of our most precious cars, the 300 SLR Uhlenhaut coupé, for €135 million. We donated the proceeds to fund beVisioneers, a fellowship programme for young people to develop projects that benefit the environment and society”
Last holiday: Thailand
WORKING DAY
Ola Kallenius gets



Kallenius's last holiday was to Thailand. A charity auction of a 300 SLR Uhlenhaut coupé, below, raised €135 million

up at 6.20am and is often stuck in meetings from 8am, but he tries to arrange to test-drive cars in the Black Forest. The days he enjoys the most are “the ones when I talk about the cars of the future, especially design and technology,” at Mercedes' engineering hub in Sindelfingen near Stuttgart.

DOWNTIME
Kallenius used to play basketball and American football, but he now unwinds by running and playing tennis. “If I hit my first serve in, I'm pretty good.”



Brexit “rules of origin”, 10 per cent tariffs are to be imposed next year on exports of many EU-made cars to the UK and UK-made cars to the EU. “I understand the intention – to promote local content in cars made in Europe and in the UK,” says Kallenius. “But the battery industry is not ready in the EU or Britain. So if we were to add 10 per cent tariffs in both directions now, it would hurt both sides. There's no logic to that.” Any new trading regime should, he adds, be “postponed until the battery industry is ready”.

China is another big headache for his company. That's not to do with sales – they are skyrocketing – but because the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights has filed a complaint against Mercedes, alleging it exploits forced labour at its suppliers in the Xinjiang region. A new German law requires large companies to address social and environmental issues worldwide, with penalties ranging from a fine of up to 2 per cent of annual global sales to exclusion from government contracts for up to three years.

Kallenius responds: “We are working on this with every one of our suppliers in batteries and raw materials, coming from all sorts of different places.” Can he guarantee there is no forced labour in Mercedes' supply chain in China or anywhere else? “We're one of the companies pushing ahead to create that level of transparency.” That's not a

yes. “I'm not trying to make any definitive statement about every single thing that happens. Can anybody in any industry do that? What I can make a definitive statement about is our intention to move rapidly towards transparency.”

Mercedes sells about two million cars a year, many of them the “affordable” A-Class or B-Class hatchbacks. Does the reduction in the number of models, especially the cheaper ones, mean Kallenius is prepared to sell fewer cars? “Volume is not a dogma. I don't think the customer cares about selling one unit more or less. They care about what they get. We're going for value over volume.”

So the new models in the smaller range will cost more? “Mercedes gives you a little bit more and costs a little bit more.” That should be good for profits and for shareholders. “We are looking at a 12-14 per cent return on sales.”

Kallenius's strategy might make sound financial sense in the short to medium term, but some observers say it is risky long-term. “By moving out of the cheaper volume market, Mercedes, like other established marques, will leave a huge gap for fast-growing Chinese brands to enter and expand,” says Gavin Green, the Car Magazine columnist.

Is Kallenius worried that as Chinese manufacturers develop, they will begin producing luxury cars that threaten Mercedes because they will be far cheaper?

“We will stay in the entry segment in terms of the vehicle shapes and size, but we will have the most technologically sophisticated product and something that is a Mercedes. We will rise from there to maintain our position as the world's most valuable luxury car brand.”

Or, to put it in the words of one of those cheesy oldies he likes to listen to in his car – and will soon sing-along to with Sabine in the back seat: “The only way is up.”

Take control of your pensions



Bring them together into Fidelity's Self-Invested Personal Pension (SIPP)

Moving your pensions to our SIPP can help you manage your money more effectively. Plus, with our wide investment range and excellent service, you'll have everything you need to make more of your retirement savings.

- Thousands of funds and shares, with guidance and tools to help with your decisions
- Award-winning products and online share dealing service
- An easy-to-use online account and app, plus dedicated teams you can talk to

Call us on 0800 99 55 33 or visit fidelity.co.uk/cashback

Important information – The value of investments can go down as well as up, so you may not get back the amount you originally invest. You cannot normally access money in a SIPP until age 55 (57 from 2028). Pension transfers can be complex and may not be suitable for everyone. Pensions with guaranteed benefits and advised transfers are not eligible for this offer. Before making your decision, please read our transfer guide, pension transfer factsheet and the cashback T&Cs at fidelity.co.uk/cashback

Cashback offer!
£100 to £1,500

When you apply to transfer your pensions, ISAs or other investments to us by 25 Oct '23. Exclusions, T&Cs apply.

ISAs | Pensions | Funds | Shares | Advice



Dunkerton: I’m the man to save my beloved Superdry

The fashion retailer’s chief returned to the fold in 2019 and insists he can still turn around its fortunes. *Sam Chambers* reports

Over the August bank holiday, Julian Dunkerton, Superdry’s co-founder and chief executive, headed to his cider bar, to catch up with friends. One of them, Idris Elba, the actor-turned-superstar DJ, delighted the crowd in Cheltenham from behind the decks.

“It was absolutely brilliant,” Dunkerton enthused. The show offered some relief before another bruising week.

Superdry announced on Wednesday that its shares would be suspended because its new auditor, RSM, had been unable to finish work on the fashion retailer’s accounts before the previous day’s deadline. When the results came on Friday, Superdry reported an underlying pre-tax loss of £21.7 million on sales of £622.5 million in the year to April 29. In the 13 weeks since, sales fell 18.4 per cent.

When Dunkerton pulled off a coup in 2019 that returned him to the brand he grew from a market stall, he hailed it as a kind of “renaissance moment” but market conditions and Superdry’s missteps have left it in a precarious position.

Directors acknowledged last week that there was uncertainty over its ability to operate as a going concern. Dunkerton sees the sunny side. “You can look at one thing and think it’s all doom and gloom but, you know what, Julian has been beaver- ing away and sorting this out,” he said, slipping into the third person.

“Would this company be here if I hadn’t come back? I don’t think it would. The product is getting better, the public are starting to like it, turnover has stabilised and we are getting our cost base into the right place”.

After receiving three E grades at A-level, Dunkerton took a £2,000 loan from his father and began buying T-shirts in London to sell in Cheltenham. The venture mushroomed into a chain of shops in university towns called Cult Clothing. Dunkerton began designing Superdry

clothes with James Holder, the designer behind the Bench streetwear brand, and selling them in Cult Clothing stores in 2003. The brand’s designs won fans of all ages. David Beckham sported Superdry’s Osaka 6 T-shirt in his 2005 calendar. In 2010, its first year on the stock market, Superdry’s shares tripled.

The company’s success is stamped all over Cheltenham, or “Dunkertown” as some locals call it, where Superdry is based. Dunkerton, 58, lives there in a Georgian mansion with his wife, the fashion designer Jade Holland Cooper, 36.

Superdry’s early fans are now middle-aged men, prone to wearing their Superdry hoodie while walking the dog. Can Dunkerton convince their children that his brand is cool? “The press tries to make me ashamed of the fact that 40-year-old guys are wearing Superdry. I think it’s great – what’s wrong with that? Nike have an incredibly broad customer base. Has it hurt them? No.”

In 2014, Dunkerton handed over the reins to Euan Sutherland, the former Co-Op boss, so he could focus on product design, before leaving the business in 2018. However, Dunkerton grew disillusioned with Sutherland’s efforts to shrink Superdry’s product ranges and push the brand into children-swear.

Still a major shareholder, he waged an acrimo-



Superdry’s products are improving and winning over customers says Julian Dunkerton, the founder who returned to the business in 2019 after staging a boardroom coup

nious activist campaign in the City, named Save Superdry, to get himself reinstalled at the group. Dunkerton squeaked home with 51 per cent of the vote, helped by the votes of himself and Holder, his co-founder. The board, and most of Sutherland’s management team, quit.

When he was drumming up support for his reinstatement, Dunkerton told investors that he had no desire to run the business, only to oversee product design. He went back in as interim chief executive, only for the role to be made permanent. Peter Williams, the retailer’s new chairman, and a former boss of Selfridges, resigned in protest.

Some observers question whether Dunkerton, who uses an old Nokia rather than a smartphone – he calls it his “brick” – is still the right man to spearhead Superdry’s efforts to win over teenagers and twenty-somethings. Others wonder whether someone whose strengths lie in design is

“My job is to protect my company, my staff and the brand

suited to the hard yards of a difficult corporate turnaround. Dunkerton retorted that the brand was in his DNA and it was “patently obvious” that he was the right man for the job.

“I’m a rag trader. There are only a few of us in the world capable of understanding the relationship between the people and the product,” he said.

“I’m spending this week sorting out next autumn’s range and, I’ll tell you what, our jackets will be the best we have done by a billion miles!”

Dunkerton has sought to rekindle Superdry’s lucrative links to the Beckham family through a shortlived partnership with Brooklyn Beckham, David’s son, in 2021. Other partnerships followed with Neymar, the Brazilian footballer, and Dunkerton’s pal Elba. On top of that came bold sustainability commitments and a new flagship store on Oxford Street in London.

However, the toll taken by the pandemic and the subsequent wave of inflation has left Superdry scrambling for cash. In December it turned to Bantroy Bay, an alternative lender, to secure an £80 million loan facility with an interest rate currently in excess of 12 per cent. Bantroy then capped the amount that Superdry could borrow, forcing Dunkerton to secure a debt facility from Hilco, the high street’s lender of last resort. On top of that, Superdry sold its intellectual property rights in various Asian countries for \$50 million (£39.5 million).

Dunkerton has watched with irritation as high street rivals turned to company voluntary arrangements (CVAs), a controversial restructuring tool that helps struggling chains cut their rent bills and close stores.

“Pick a retailer out there that’s suddenly producing great profits. How did they achieve it? It is very easy to go out and CVA a company but I have done the decent and honest thing here. It feels like we are one of the only companies that hasn’t done a CVA!”

Superdry’s shares have lost 90 per cent of their value since Dunkerton’s return, closing at 56p last week, valuing the business at £54.9 million. Dunkerton’s frustration with the share price was such that he held talks with buyout firms last year about a possible plan to take the business private, although in Superdry’s current state the chances of a deal look remote. Can Dunkerton put up with life in the City?

“If that is the one bit of pain I have to go through, with people sniping at me, then so be it. My job is to protect my company, my staff and the brand”.

Superdry’s staff will hope their captain can chart a course through stormy waters, rather than going down with his ship.

GENERAL CLASSIFIED

Worth toasting

The world of whisky cask buying awaits. Whisky Partners are passionate about sourcing casks from diverse distilleries to help you craft the perfect collection. Think of whisky casks as a unique addition to your investment portfolio; they not only show steady performance but also offer protection unlike traditional financial assets.†

- ✔ Totally tax-free profits when you sell your cask while in bond
- ✔ Capital Gains Tax-exempt
- ✔ Cask management programme with full insurance*
- ✔ We have over 4,000 customers and 18,000 casks under management
- ✔ Casks start from as little as £2,500

Call 020 8154 5219

Lines open Monday to Friday 8am-6:30pm

† The value of cask investment can down as well as up. We recommend seeking financial advice before investing. *Subject to policy exclusions, terms and conditions. Whisky Partners is the trading name of Blackford Casks Ltd (reg no 12348943) 134/136 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 9SA.



feefo 4.8/5 ★★★★★

LinkedIn defies the cool crew

William Turvill

On an early autumn afternoon about 21 years ago, a group of Silicon Valley nerds gathered at the one-bedroom flat of Reid Hoffman in Mountain View, a featureless city south of San Francisco notable only as the home of Alphabet’s HQ, the Googleplex.

Stephen Beitzel, who worked with Hoffman at Apple, recalled sitting on a second-hand couch and listening to his friend lay out a vision for a new business. Hoffman wanted to replace and digitise the Rolodex, a card filing system used by office workers to store people’s contact details.

Hoffman, who’d studied symbolic systems at Stanford and then philosophy at Oxford, had worked at Fujitsu and PayPal, and been a co-founder of the unsuccessful online dating site SocialNet. He described to his friends the business that would become LinkedIn. Just over 20 years on the Rolodex is long gone and LinkedIn has 950 million members.

Newly filed accounts in the UK show the growth of its British arm – a small fraction of the overall group. In 2022, LinkedIn Technology UK’s revenues grew 20 per cent to £215 million, and its operating profit was \$51 million. Over the year, LinkedIn expanded its UK headcount by 39 per cent to 497.

It has proved to be one of the world’s most durable and sustainable social media networks.

Not everyone’s a fan. Elon Musk, in a post last week on his own platform Twitter/X, bemoaned the “cringe” factor of people on LinkedIn. He was referring to how users regularly boast about how brilliant they are, or post glowing testimonials in praise of their bosses.

There is even a Twitter/X

account called “The State of LinkedIn” devoted to the worst offenders. It dubs the site “a breeding ground for lies and brown-nosing.”

Musk has hinted that he was working on a competitor that would be “cool”. He has said this could include offering companies the ability to hire through the platform.

LinkedIn started as a platform made up essentially of a list of professional profiles. In the early 2010s, it expanded into allowing users to write posts to share with their connections. Now it also offers the opportunity to create newsletters and audio clips.

Bought by Microsoft for \$26.2 billion in 2016, the business is led by Ryan Roslansky, chief executive, who joined the company in 2009. Hoffman stepped down as executive chairman in 2016 and is on Microsoft’s board. Microsoft has invested hard, expanding its workforce from under 10,000 to nearly 20,000 today. LinkedIn’s annual global revenues recently passed \$15 billion, up from \$2.3 billion in 2017.

Turnover comes from premium subscriptions, which allow users to message anyone on the platform, as well as training courses, advertising and marketing tools. Its bread and butter remains recruitment. Over the past year, LinkedIn’s “talent solutions” business, which offers recruitment tools to more than 800,000 firms, generated revenues of \$7 billion. According to LinkedIn, eight people are hired every minute on its platform.

Jo-Ann Feely, the global managing director for innovation at AMS,

the recruitment company, said LinkedIn is “by far the biggest tool for a recruiter”.

AMS hires roughly 250,000 people each year and sifts through about six million candidates for roles. Feely estimated that LinkedIn would be part of the process for up to 80 per cent of hires.

After conquering the Rolodex, Feely predicted that LinkedIn’s next victim would be the CV. “In the last three or four years, since the pandemic, it’s become acceptable to use your LinkedIn profile as your CV. You send a LinkedIn profile before going to an interview.”

Dan Roth, LinkedIn’s editor-in-chief, was brought into the company in 2011 to oversee content on its feed. While social media rivals such as Facebook and Twitter/X are known for posts that go “viral” and often stoke conflict, on LinkedIn, Roth said users “keep it civil”. He suggested that this was because it is a professional site and so members keep their conduct professional.

Does it worry him that LinkedIn is so widely mocked for the earnestness of its content – the “cringe” factor

cited by Musk? No. “One person’s cringe is another person’s discussion of how they’re going to reach the next quarterly goals,” he said. “LinkedIn is a pretty sincere network ... It’s not a network where people think ‘Do I sound cool?’”

Eric Ly, LinkedIn’s founding chief technology officer, admitted that in the early years the team was frustrated by the high-profile growth of rival social media, such as Twitter and Facebook. “We had internal discussions about what they were doing,” he said. “We concluded that we had a real purpose in focusing on the professional realm.”

Others have sought to challenge LinkedIn, most notably Google. Its product, Google+, lasted eight years and closed in 2019. Ly said: “LinkedIn managed to carve out a niche for itself and build a moat around the network that is difficult to replicate. I don’t believe that there’s going to be a similar platform in the foreseeable future.”

LinkedIn’s reach will always be limited. The platform is not designed to appeal to children or teenagers; and upon retirement, it also becomes slightly irrelevant.

That even includes co-founder Beitzel. When LinkedIn went public in 2011, he and his wife made \$18 million from their shares and Beitzel, 55, took an early retirement.

“If I’m not looking for employment, or hiring anyone, I don’t see LinkedIn as providing a whole lot,” Beitzel said.

“The things that people write about on there – doing business development and business analysis, you know what? I just don’t care.”



Registration Numbers

Est. 1982

Regtransfers.co.uk

PERSONAL NUMBER PLATES

01582 967777

9am-9pm • 7 days

25%OFF

SELECTED REGISTRATIONS

IADB	1VW	62EH	1GAP	1JFW	KRW1	1MST	PMO1	1SFH	VE1	CS I
IAER	1CAE	87EJ	GDA7	JGL1	1KWB	1NDM	POO1	1SGT	1VEB	I FAT
IAFA	6CBG	42GE	EJE1	JHE1	L45	1NEC	PPC1	1SHB	1VJD	GB 6
AG1	1CBR	EJK6	1GEC	1JHR	1BHI	NEG1	PR3	1SHG	1VW1	HAH I
ALK1	58CE	EJM1	GEP1	1JUA	7LCA	1NGC	PRC1	1TSJ	70VK	JJE I
ANI	1CTS	1EJO	1GMK	JLA1	1LDD	1NHB	25PU	9SLK	1VLM	LK I
AP1	1CVC	1EMT	73GR	JLN1	LE1	1NLP	1PWW	1SNP	1VLS	I MSW
IAAT	1CH1	1ENE	HAB1	JMR1	1LEC	1NLW	1RCF	1STG	1BVT	OP I
93AY	DOF1	1ENP	HCT1	JTT1	1LEK	1NML	RD59	SVC1	1WAX	23 PN
59BC	8DEJ	60EP	HD11	85JU	1LJV	1NPD	1RDT	1SWA	1WCB	RN I
3BCT	DGF1	ERJ4	HET1	40JV	LS1	1NPW	3RFP	1TCR	WD8	TS 3I
1BDD	7DHD	1EWH	4JVC	LN2	1ND1	1IRS	TE2	1WET	1W8	VAL I
BDR1	1DHP	1FAC	HGM1	1JVG	1LPW	1NRH	RG69	TEB1	WH4	WS I
BE1	1DHT	4FAP	1HUE	1JWA	1LRJ	1NRJ	RGD1	TG2	WHH7	YE I
2BEJ	1DKP	59FB	HUP1	KBS1	1LRT	1NRM	RGPI	TJJ1	1WJE	
1BUT	1EDD	FR3	1HIT	KGI1	1KGV	1NRE	RJP1	TJ01	1WJG	
1BLC	EGF1	90FT	HW6	1JHW	1KDJ	1MBW	4OY1	RK1	1WTB1	
6BHS	DT6	FD6	1HJW	1KDJ	1MBW	4OY1	RK1	1WTB1	1WY	
94BJ	9EAA	1FEM	1HKS	KDP2	1MEJ	1PBH	RKM1	1TLA	1WY	
6BK1	1EAD	85FF	HL3	1KEK	1MFI	1PDP1	1RLO	1TSL	75X	
BK1	1EAL	1FPI	1HLE	1KGI	1MGE	1PEK	7R2	1TLW	X1	
BK1	1EBW	3FMW	HMF1	1KGB	MJY1	1PES	RPA1	TN1	Y11	
8BJN	1ECB	FP1	1HMK	1KGS	6MLA	1PFH	1RTJ	TR7	1YD	
1BUT	1ECD	FR3	1HIT	KGI1	1MFI	1PDP1	1RLO	1TSL	75X	
1BLC	EGF1	90FT	HW6	1JHW	1KDJ	1MBW	4OY1	RK1	1WTB1	
BLH1	1ECL	76FW	1HJW	1KDJ	1MBW	4OY1	RK1	1WTB1	1WY	
BMF1	1ECC	90FY	JCG1	1KLE	1MNV	5PW	7SD	1VAD	1YR	
3BPR	1EES	1GAU	1JDO	5KNM	1MPB	5PLR	1SDW	1VAD	1YR	

Get a free, no-obligation valuation from our experts

SL60 OXW

07436 388466

Merc / Oily Loves Will or sim

Loans & Investments

FAST Cheaper Private Bridging & Development Finance. 07958531020

Business Opportunities

ULEZ Business Opportunity Profit from adversity. As history shows. Explore gains where others falter. Visit us now. seize opportunity now! Free e-book when you register to find out more. Capital at risk. 02033930835 info@newbusinessopportunityuk https://newbusinessopportunityuk/seed-investor

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Book your advertisement now at: thesundaytimes.co.uk/advertise

Oliver Shah

After Wilko, it’s time to shine a light on the murky world of insolvency



Wilko and Hilco might rhyme, but they are very different beasts. The former is – or, rather, was – a family-owned retailer run along paternalistic lines, whose bosses provided cut-price holiday homes to workers and put hundreds of students from poor backgrounds through university. The latter is a vulture fund that has feasted on the carcasses of collapsed chains such as Alders and Debenhams – a business profitable enough that its executive chairman moved to the tax haven of Monaco.

Savvy observers could see where things were going when Wilko stumbled into Hilco’s clutches in December. The discount retailer, chaired by the granddaughter of founder JK Wilkinson, borrowed £40 million, giving the fund security over land and intellectual property. Once Hilco gets its claws into a struggling company, the end is usually only a matter of time away. “You sup with Hilco with a long spoon,” says someone who watched what unfolded. Nine months later, after spiralling into

a cash crisis, Wilko was in administration. Pride was partly what got it there: Lisa Wilkinson apparently turned down a big takeover offer from rival B&M a few years ago and last year blanched at suggestions that Wilko needed a radical restructuring. But there is no place for pride in the dark underworld of insolvency. An unedifying spectacle has played out over the past month as Poundland’s owner and B&M vied to carve up its shop portfolio, and an oddball private equity firm calling itself M2 Capital popped up with an illusory bid for the business, cruelly giving false hope to 12,500 staff.

Doug Putman, the Canadian tycoon who owns HMV, is still working on a deal to buy about 300 shops, with administrators from PwC trying to get comfortable with the financing behind his offer. But Wilko’s failure has been a reminder of just how opaque the insolvency process has remained, even as the corporate world above ground has tried to become more transparent.

PwC was originally the Wilkinson family’s adviser. At the end of last year, it helped Lisa Wilkinson recruit a new

WILKO’S ROAD TO RUIN		
	Sales	Profit/Loss
2018	£1.62bn	£-65m
2019	£1.56bn	£32.6m
2020	£1.47bn	£11.4m
2021	£1.36bn	£4.4m
2022	£1.32bn	£-36.8m

Source: Companies House accounts for Wilkinson Hardware Stores Limited

management team. That team then hired PwC to advise the company. There’s nothing necessarily wrong with this but the blurring of loyalties could not be described as best practice. “It’s not always the case that a company and the shareholders’ interests are aligned – in fact, often quite the opposite,” a restructuring veteran points out.

Hilco had already come in as secured lender by that point. When Wilko went bust, PwC appointed Hilco to liquidate the stock. The dual lender/liquidator

role is a Hilco favourite. It did that combo when it ripped apart Alders with Philip Green in 2005. Last year it was made liquidator to Cath Kidston’s shops, having been the furnishing company’s owner. The administrator then? PwC.

Sources close to PwC argue that Hilco knew Wilko better than other so-called stock agents through its loan position, and that its fees were benchmarked against the alternatives.

But it looks a bit cosy. In other industries, such potential conflicts of interest would provoke more outcry. EY’s triple role as adviser and then creditor and administrator to battery start-up Britishvolt did cause ripples. But by definition, insolvency happens outside the glare of public markets – and many of the stakeholders involved, such as staff and suppliers, lack the money, time or sophistication to challenge them.

There are exceptions. When BHS went under in 2016, sparking a scandal over the £571 million hole in its retirement scheme, the Pension Protection Fund brought in a second set of administrators. That was because it was it was suspicious about the first set’s

connections to Green, BHS’s former owner. When you consider that administrators’ duties include investigating the past conduct of directors – and yet they’re often appointed by those directors – you realise that this stuff matters.

In theory, administrations are at the more transparent end of the insolvency spectrum. “Pre-packs” – where a company is dipped into insolvency, pulled out shorn of its liabilities and sold, sometimes to its former owner – have resulted in scandals such as the Silentnight affair. KPMG was heavily fined for acting in the interests of the private equity firm that bought the bed-maker without the burden of its pension scheme, rather than the company itself, which was KPMG’s actual client. Company voluntary arrangements (CVAs), used to close shops and cut rents, are hated by landlords. Property owners’ voting rights are diluted and they tend to argue that CVAs are abused.

In fairness to the insolvency profession, distressed situations are almost always high-pressure. Market conditions will probably be treacherous.

MPs and unions might be shouting about jobs. Possible saviours can ride in from leftfield with very few credentials. Administrators have to make quick judgments about a company’s future.

But there are very few other fields of business where such big calls are made on jobs and money with so little scrutiny of potential conflicts. In 2021, rules came into force on pre-packs, requiring quick deals to be blessed either by creditors or a third-party evaluator. That’s far from perfect: the evaluator doesn’t have to hold specific qualifications, they’re appointed by the would-be buyer, there’s the risk of “opinion shopping” – and even if their report is negative, the transaction can still go ahead. The administrator just has to file a note explaining why.

All insolvency processes would benefit from proper oversight – perhaps from a new regulator. In this everyone-for-themselves twilight world, parties with deep pockets can afford to protect their own interests. It’s the ones who can’t – staff, pensioners and suppliers – who tend to get screwed.

oliver.shah@sunday-times.co.uk

Better news for the UK, but search for growth goes on



David Smith Economic Outlook

Positive growth surprises are so rare these days that we should celebrate the fact that the Office for National Statistics (ONS), searching diligently down the back of the statistical sofa, managed to find some extra growth for the UK a couple of years ago, giving us an upbeat end to the summer.

New official gross domestic product (GDP) estimates on Friday have changed the economic picture to one much more like the “V-shaped” recession and recovery I thought we would see when the pandemic struck. History has been rewritten, so that instead of collapsing by 11 per cent in 2020, the fall was a slightly less scary 10.4 per cent. In 2021, the economy grew by 8.7 per cent, up from a previously estimated 7.6 per cent.

Most significantly, the economy at the end of 2021 was 0.6 per cent above pre-pandemic levels, whereas previous estimates had suggested it was 1.2 per cent below. The new figures remove some of the UK’s inferiority complex compared with other countries and are easier to square with other data for the labour market and tax revenues. By late 2021, which is as far as the revisions go, the UK had recovered more than most, behind only America and Canada.

These were larger revisions than usual, reflecting the fact that estimating the data during the pandemic was harder than usual, as were many things. They do not, though, change the current growth dilemma. The UK economy has barely grown since the start of last year, GDP rising by a mere 0.5 per cent since the beginning of 2022. Tacking on growth since then to the revised figures leaves the UK well below the OECD average for growth in the past 3-4 years.

And this is before the impact of higher interest rates – tighter monetary policy – which surveys show is having a significant impact in the current quarter, and may have a bigger impact later. So the search for growth persists, and it extends beyond these shores.

This is the season for big international economic gatherings. A couple of weeks ago, leaders of the Brics countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – met, though Vladimir Putin could not attend in person due to the International Criminal Court warrant for his arrest for war crimes; he dialled in.

Soon there will be a summit in India of G20 countries – the big advanced and emerging economies. Rishi Sunak, who has drawn criticism for skipping the United Nations’ General Assembly, will attend this meeting in New Delhi in a few days (September 9-10) and may have a bilateral meeting with China’s president, Xi Jinping. The G20, divided on Russia-Ukraine, may not be a meeting of minds.

Following these gatherings will be annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, to be held in Marrakech, Morocco, from October 9-15.

All this summitty is probably mainly of interest to those attending, but behind it there is a fundamental question. When will the world economy gets its mojo back and where will growth come from? Take Brics. When the acronym was invented for Goldman Sachs by Jim

History has been rewritten and the fall in GDP looks less scary

O’Neill more than 20 years ago, it did not include South Africa, host of last month’s summit, which took advantage of the stray “s” to add itself.

As for the original Brics, it soon became clear that, of these giants of the emerging world, only China and India really cut the mustard. Now, with its economy once more threatened by the bursting of a property bubble, even China is under a cloud. Its high watermark, of growth averaging nearly 10 per cent a year, is long gone. Now it struggles to hit 5 per cent. Its greatest glory, strong growth during the 2008-9 global financial crisis as the West suffered what was then its deepest recession since the Second World War, is now history.

We should not write off China, and the criticism of foreign secretary James Cleverly for visiting Beijing – and Sunak for his proposed meeting with Xi, is misplaced. The reality is that we have to trade with countries we do not much like and have plenty to criticise for. With China, the world’s second-biggest

economy and the UK’s fifth-largest export market, and second- biggest source of imports, with bilateral trade of £100 billion a year, this is the case.

In many ways, China is following the script set out by O’Neill two decades ago, which had it slowing to 5 per cent and then 3 per cent growth as it converged on western economies. And China growing by 5 per cent now adds more to the global economy than when it was growing by 10 per cent 20 or so years ago.

China is not what it was, however, and three of the other current Brics – Brazil, Russia and South Africa – are set for weak growth, deservedly for Russia, which fell into recession last year.

That leaves India, the brightest star in the Brics, with growth projected by the IMF at 6 to 7 per cent this year and next. There are also issues about its leadership, but the UK would love closer trade ties. India is only the UK’s 13th-biggest export destination and 23rd-largest source of imports, and bilateral trade is less than a fifth of that with China. There are other ties, of course, as with China, including investment and student numbers.

The big question remains, which is when will the world grow again at anything like its normal rate? Advanced economies as a group are growing by 1 per cent or so, emerging economies by 4 per cent. Both are well below normal, which would be 2 and 6 per cent.

Among advanced economies, the US is the brightest spot and has grown by the most in the G7 since before the pandemic. But its economy has yet to

feel the full impact of higher interest rates, as is the case for other advanced economies. Tighter monetary policy reduces growth.

There is another explanation, related to this. It is no accident that two economies whose governments have just brought forward stimulus measures to boost growth, China and Germany, are also two of the world’s three-biggest exporters, the other being America.

World trade, as monitored by the CPB Netherlands bureau for economic policy analysis, has been muted since recovering from its big pandemic fall, sometimes recording small monthly rises, sometimes declines. There is a debate about whether America’s trade war with China, instituted during the Trump presidency, reduced or diverted trade, but the World Trade Organisation found that by the end of the 2010s, and before Covid, trade restrictions were at historically high levels. Most remain.

Slow growth in world trade is thus at the heart of the subdued outlook for the global economy, and the fact that it is hard to find any genuinely bright spots. The IMF expects world trade to grow by only 2 per cent this year and just over 3.5 per cent next – in each case, much weaker than normal.

If the various summits in the next few weeks are to have any value, it would be in trying to reinvigorate world trade, which is in the doldrums. That matters for the UK and it matters for every other economy. Otherwise, we will have to get used to a slow-growing world economy.

PS We won’t get new figures for inflation, covering August, until September 20, the day before the Bank of England’s next decision on interest rates – but people are braced for disappointment. The Treasury is nervous about the next couple of inflation releases, particularly for September, published next month.

September’s figure will determine how much the state pension rises next April, and it will be touch and go whether, it or the figure for the growth in earnings, delivers the bigger increase.

The problem is all around us. Petrol, the most visible price in the economy, is up again, although still a long way below post-Ukraine highs. The government’s “reform” of alcohol duties meant an increase in prices, too. Economists at ING Bank have been asking if we are watching a 1970s re-run, illustrated with a picture of Starksy and Hutch. They think not – ING, that is.

Statistically, it is not until October that comparators from last year are really helpful. In the same month in 2022, due to a big energy bill hike, the consumer prices index jumped 1.9 per cent.

Economists at Bank of America, factoring all this in, expect August’s inflation rate to rise to 7.1 per cent from July’s 6.8 per cent, despite a small fall in “core” inflation. The key September figure will be 6.9 per cent, they think – higher than the Treasury would like. October should bring a big fall to closer to 5 per cent, though we won’t know until November. But the falling inflation story will pause for a few weeks, and that will generate uncomfortable headlines.

david.smith@sunday-times.co.uk

Dr Fed’s inflation diagnosis is flawed

Irwin Stelzer American Account

It isn’t easy making monetary policy, especially if you’re Federal Reserve chairman Jay Powell, who claims to be data dependent. As measured by GDP, the US economy increased at an annual rate of 2.1 per cent in the second quarter, rather than the 2.4 per cent originally estimated by the government, but it now seems to be accelerating.

Incomes are down but spending is up. The housing market is cooling in response to 7 per cent-plus mortgage rates, but construction spending rose in August for the seventh straight month. The Conference Board’s estimate of consumer confidence fell significantly in August, with 69 per cent of respondents expecting a recession within the year – but many are, nevertheless, planning more overseas holidays than in the recent past, and finding costly ways to entertain themselves. By reducing their savings rate in July to 3.5 per cent, from 4.3 per cent in June – well below the 2019 pre-Covid average of 8.8 per cent – they were able to spend top dollar on *Barbie* (\$155 million on the opening weekend of the film, about \$11 million a day since then), and Taylor Swift’s Eras tour (headed toward a \$1 billion take). Economists at the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco estimate that this is the quarter in which US households will exhaust excess savings accumulated in the pandemic.

Perhaps most important to the Fed is the state of the labour market, which Powell has described as “unhealthy” – too tight. It is loosening and so far has not gone beyond merely looser to worrying levels associated with recessions.

- Job creation fell below 200,000 in August for the third month in a row for the first time since the pandemic.
- Previous estimates for June and July were revised down by 110,000.
- The unemployment rate rose to 3.8 per cent, its highest in 18 months.
- Job openings fell in July to 8.8 million, from 9.2 million in June and from the March 2022 peak of 12 million. That comes to 1.5 jobs per unemployed worker, below the 2.0 in March 2022 but still above the 1.2 pre-pandemic level.
- Come-hither offers from employers on the hunt for workers fell, reducing the incentive of workers to job jump. Job resignations fell to their lowest level since January 2021.
- Labour supply is increasing. Some 736,000 people entered or re-entered the labour force in August.

Data on inflation is also moving in the direction the Fed prefers, but slowly. Its preferred measure of inflation came in at 4.21 per cent in July, significantly below the peak of 5.42 per cent in February 2022. It has fallen in eight of the past ten months, but remains stickily above the Fed’s 2 per cent target.

These sets of data leave the Fed’s monetary policymakers with two choices. They can increase interest rates at the next opportunity, at the risk of severe damage to the economy. Or they can recognise that monetary policy operates with a lag, and stand pat after increasing the bank’s benchmark interest rate 11 times in 17 months from about zero to a range of 5.25-5.50 per

cent. Powell candidly admitted: “As is often the case, we are navigating by the stars under cloudy skies.”

Too much, too soon seems the greater risk. Inflation is coming down, as are job openings. Bidding for workers is no longer red hot. Regional banks will be reining in lending. Higher mortgage rates have cooled the housing market. Older commercial buildings, devoid of attractive employee amenities, cannot survive the new three or four-day work week, making it impossible for developers to refinance mortgages coming due. The manufacturing sector has been contracting for ten consecutive months and new orders for its products for twelve consecutive months.

Meanwhile, the slowdown of China’s economy is easing price pressure on the world’s resources, and the resumption



Too much, too soon on interest rates seems the greater risk

of student loan payments will begin the diversion of about \$1.6 trillion (£1.3 trillion) from stores to the federal treasury during the Christmas quarter, which accounts for about 70 per cent of retailers’ annual revenue. There is no sign that near-term inflation expectations are becoming embedded.

The case for a pause is supported by two below-the-radar facts. The first is that the failure of inflation to respond sufficiently to Dr Fed’s existing course of treatment is due to a misdiagnosis of its cause. Perhaps exogenous causes – bottlenecks, Putin, a run of bad weather, loose fiscal policy, the Biden administration’s shift to a government-managed industrial policy – are the culprits. None is importantly affected by the level of interest rates.

Or it might be that the specialists huddled around the patient in the Fed boardroom are looking at an outdated metric, and that inflation can be considered beaten when running at 3 per cent rather than at 2 per cent.

The most data-laden week is behind us, and the Fed war cry is unchanged at “higher, longer” – when how high or how much longer are yet to be decided. Meanwhile, it’s so far, so good. Inflation is coming down in a still-robust economy, with a still-healthy labour market.

irwin@irwinstelzer.com

Irwin Stelzer is a business adviser

BUSINESS

Prufrock

William Turvill

Gilbert’s home truths for spaceman Musk

Martin Gilbert, the sociable architect of the disastrous Abrdn merger, who counts Donald Trump among his golfing buddies, gave us mortals the benefit of his wisdom last week in a column for Aberdeen’s Press & Journal newspaper calling on us all to go green. Perhaps filing from his laptop at the 18th hole of one of his four golf clubs, or in between hands at the poker room at London’s Victoria casino, he opined: “We should all recognise that we are stewards, rather than owners, of the world and its resources, and hand it on to the next generation in a better state than we found it.”

Gilbert, a canny operator, knows that a worthy column on sustainability initiatives is unlikely to attract much attention. And so, presumably with his headline in mind, he concluded his lengthy article by veering off into a sharp dig at Elon Musk, the boss of X, Tesla and SpaceX. “There are many varied businesses contributing to the drive for sustainability, which is good news,” wrote Gilbert. “No offence to Elon Musk and his ambitions for space tourism, but I’d rather remain on this planet as long as it’s habitable.” Over to you, Mr Musk.

● When Amanda Blanc, the Aviva boss, appointed Adam Winslow to run the insurer’s international operations in December 2020 she welcomed his “focus and decisiveness”. She also paid tribute to Chris Wei whom Winslow was replacing (sort of), offering him “huge thanks and best wishes for the future”. So Prufrock could not help but notice that when Winslow’s appointment to take charge of his own listed company, Direct Line, was announced last week, there were no thanks from Blanc for his service. Instead she focused on the executive reshuffle caused by his departure. “I am delighted to make these appointments ... which strengthen the executive management of Aviva,” Blanc said. Winslow’s leaving drinks could be a frosty affair ...



Elon Musk’s space tourism was attacked by Martin Gilbert

JUST SAYING ...

If you can’t commit, it’s probably not going to work out for you at Amazon because we are going back to the office at least three days a week



Chief executive Andy Jassy issues a stark warning to staff who are unwilling to ditch their working from home ways

Moulding’s morning call

Matthew Moulding, it would seem, has made it a personal mission to be a regular in this column. The founder and chief executive of THG was back on LinkedIn on Friday, explaining the back story to his decision to buy City AM, London’s free business newspaper. He also aimed a dig at this newspaper – yes, Matt, we’re reading – and waxed lyrical about the challenges of being an entrepreneur. “True entrepreneurship,” he declared, airily adding a new word to the lexicon, “is dealing with the relentless grind, sacrifices and disappointments, but keeping going throughout. The jets and yachts don’t ever come otherwise.” Inspiring stuff. Prufrock looks forward to next week’s LinkedIn edition of Moulding AM.

Nice work if you can get it at UBS

Before he left his post running UBS in 2020, the suave Swiss banker Sergio Ermotti took home a tidy £3.3

million Swiss francs (about £12 million) - a hefty number even in banking circles. So, when he was parachuted back into UBS this year after it rescued Credit Suisse, there was much chatter in the banking world about how large his next package might be. Particularly after the enlarged bank reported record one-off profits of \$29 billion last week due to the deal. Asked by a Swiss journalist



Quiet start: Spotify boss Daniel Ek avoids screens

whether more profit, and a larger bank, would mean more wonga for the chief executive, he seemed unamused. “No,” he said, “I mean, the compensation is driven by consideration of profits, delivering on plan.” He added that “for sure, it would be nice to get compensation based on \$29 billion profits”. That’s cleared up then. We look forward to perusing UBS’s next annual report.

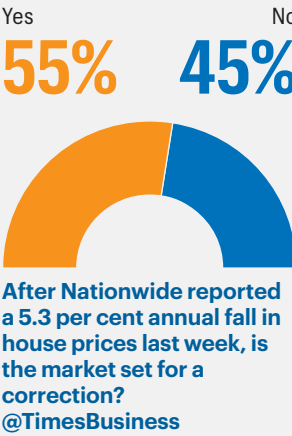
Spotify boss has a screen break

Daniel Ek, the chief executive of Spotify, took to X (née Twitter) last week to deliver some right-on advice to his followers. “A few years ago, I started a new habit of making sure I wake up each morning with at least 30 minutes without a screen. It’s just me and my thoughts. This may be one of the most powerful life hacks and so simple.” So said the man who founded Spotify, one of the world’s biggest and most heavily used phone apps, with 550 million users. Ek will probably hope that not all his customers practise what he preaches.

FUNNY BUSINESS



TWITTER POLL



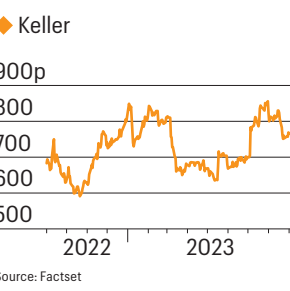
THE TIPSTER

LUCY TOBIN

Keller has prepared the ground for growth

Almost 100 years ago, German drilling business Johann Keller devised “vibro compaction” – using vibrations in deep holes to compact soil and boost its bearing capacity. The FTSE 250 construction engineering firm bearing the Keller name today has gone through myriad M&A deals – it started as the ground-engineering division of the UK’s GKN in the 1950s, before buying Johann Keller in 1975 and rebranding – but some of its 10,000 staff still deploy vibro compaction. Keller laid 500 vibro concrete columns for the foundations of London’s Olympic Stadium. It also carried out metro tunnelling in Melbourne and worked on a deep sewerage system in Singapore. To potential investors, though, its success seems to have stayed underground: shares in the

company are down 10 per cent so far this year. Part of the hit came from January’s admission that it had sacked two Australian workers over an “apparently deliberate and sophisticated” financial reporting fraud that led to profits in the region being overstated. But the stock has also lost a quarter of its value in the past five years, now trading at 762p. The price to earnings ratio for 2024 is just 6.5, against 8.1 last year. This seems at odds with macro conditions and Keller’s own performance. The infrastructure and housing crisis means high demand for its engineering work, which helps turn brownfield sites into land ripe for development. Keller, meanwhile, reported record numbers at its half-year results at the start of August,



with revenues up 6 per cent at £1.5 billion. In the US, which provides just over half of revenues, underlying operating profit more than doubled. That helped Keller both post higher margins and tell the markets that operating profit for the full year will be “materially ahead”. The firm inched up the half-year dividend by 5 per cent to 13.9p. Keller’s order book now stands at £1.5 billion, almost a record, and more contracts are expected in the coming months, including a second deal on Saudi Arabia’s new. \$500 billion city in the desert, Neom. Analysts also flag big opportunities in energy on LNG facilities and, possibly, UK nuclear. Keller is now working in about 40 countries, and Joe Brent at broker Liberum puts the market for this type of engineering work at £38 billion, with Keller currently having an 8 per cent global market share. He sees the stock as “attractive” given its “strong cash generation, under-levered balance sheet and the wide array of opportunities on offer”. Keller’s underground work is ready for time in the sun: buy.

THE WEEK IN THE MARKETS

FTSE 100

7,464.54

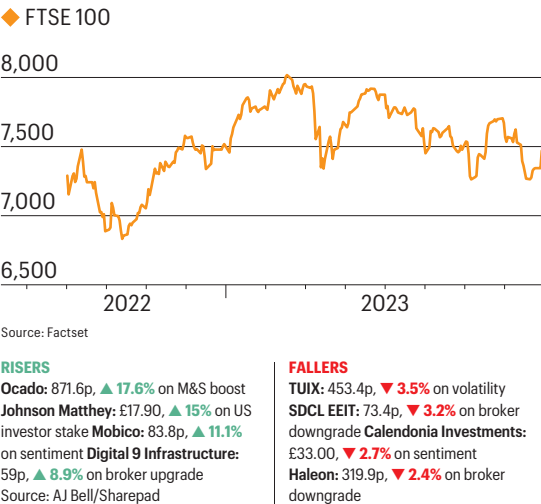
▲ 125.96 H: 8,047.10
▲ 1.72% L: 6,707.10

FTSE 250

FTSE 100

18,536.90

▲ 405.88 H: 20,614.80
▲ 2.24% L: 16,520.50



DOW JONES
34,837.71
▲ 490.81 H: 35,679.13
▲ 1.43% L: 28,660.94



NASDAQ
14,031.81
▲ 441.16 H: 14,446.55
▲ 3.25% L: 10,088.83



S&P 500
4,515.77
▲ 110.06 H: 4,607.07
▲ 2.50% L: 3,491.58



NIKKEI
32,710.62
▲ 1,086.3 H: 33,772.89
▲ 3.44% L: 25,621.96



HANG SENG
18,382.06
▲ 425.68 H: 22,700.85
▲ 2.37% L: 14,597.31



SHANGHAI
3,133.25
▲ 69.18 H: 3,418.95
▲ 2.26% L: 2,885.09



CAC 40
7,296.77
▲ 67.17 H: 7,581.26
▲ 0.93% L: 5,628.42



DAX
15,840.34
▲ 208.54 H: 16,528.97
▲ 1.33% L: 11,862.84



FTSE EUROFIRST
1,812.07
▲ 23.53 H: 1,812.07
▲ 1.32% L: 1,016.04



SENSEX
65,387.16
▲ 500.65 H: 67,619.17
▲ 0.77% L: 56,147.23



ALL ORDS
7,489.90
▲ 157.30 H: 7,779.40
▲ 2.15% L: 6,609.80



S&P TSX
20,558.52
▲ 723.17 H: 20,843.21
▲ 3.65% L: 17,873.18

DOLLAR

USD > GBP
\$1.2596
▲ 0.0025 12-month high: \$1.3142
low: \$1.0349

EURO

EUR > GBP
€1.1680
▲ 0.0028 12-month high: €1.1869
low: €1.0786

YEN

YEN > USD
¥146.10
▼ 0.19 12-month high: ¥151.95
low: ¥127.23

OIL

DOLLARS/BARREL
\$87.73
▲ 3.78 12-month high: \$103.48
low: \$70.12

GOLD

DOLLARS/TROY OZ
\$1,941.15
▲ 1.25 12-month high: \$2,085.40
low: \$1,621.10

BITCOIN

DOLLARS
\$25,805.3
▼ 119.7 12-month high: \$31,638
low: \$15,508
Price at 12.30pm Saturday

THE ECONOMY

Consumer prices index	current rate	prev. month
	6.8%	7.9%
CPI including housing	current rate	prev. month
	6.4%	7.3%
Retail prices index	current rate	prev. month
	9.0%	10.7%
Average weekly earnings	prev. month	on last year
£663	▲ 1.2%	▲ 8.5%
Unemployment	current rate	prev. month
1.44m	4.2%	4.0%
Manufacturing output	on the year	on last month
	▲ 3.1%	▲ 2.4%
Retail sales	on the year	on last month
	▼ 3.2%	▼ 1.2%
UK trade balance (£bn)	latest 3 mths	prev. 3 mths
-19.9	-19.4	-187.9
Gross domestic product	latest quarter	prev. quarter
▲ 0.2%	▲ 0.1%	▲ 0.4%
Budget deficit (PSN) in £bn	last month	prev. month
-4.3	-17.9	-56.6

10-YEAR BOND YIELDS %

	variation	12 months	
		high	low
UK	4.430	▼ 0.013	4.760
US	4.177	▼ 0.057	4.366
JAPAN	0.632	▼ 0.028	0.684
GERMANY	2.549	▼ 0.013	2.774

TOP 200 COMPANIES

Market cap ranking	Price	Change on week	52-week	Mkt Cap
▼			high low	(£m)
108 Abrdn	164.8	+3.7	236.7	133.0
57 Admiral	2430.0	+40.0	2467.0	1881.5
85 Airtel Africa	115.0	+4.1	144.0	103.7
195 AJ Bell	287.2	+7.0	390.0	255.2
19 Anglo American	2136.0	+105.0	3672.5	1970.0
36 Antofagasta	1471.0	+69.5	1805.0	1042.5
175 Ashmore	194.1	+3.2	286.4	180.9
24 Ashtead	5546.0	+158.0	5874.0	3829.0
34 Associated British Foods	1985.0	+32.0	2114.0	1237.0
178 Assura	45.2	+0.6	64.8	43.2
114 Aston Martin Lagonda	345.8	+7.8	395.4	89.6
1 AstraZeneca	10700.0	+40.0	12294.0	9656.0
40 Auto Trader	607.4	+20.4	669.0	466.2
40 Aviva	375.0	+5.3	462.4	369.7
142 Balcovia International	389.0	+0.6	394.2	268.6
17 BAE	1007.5	+16.1	1032.0	714.6
151 Balfour Beatty	323.2	+3.2	393.4	294.6
161 Bank of Georgia	3465.0	-15.0	3635.0	1944.0
25 Barclays	149.1	+5.1	189.7	133.9
83 Barratt Developments	450.5	+19.2	506.4	323.4
97 Beazley	551.5	+10.5	687.5	503.0
121 Bellway	2120.0	+88.0	2500.0	1586.5
87 Berkeley	4046.0	+137.0	4504.0	3165.0
143 Big Yellow Group	1057.0	+14.0	1290.0	987.0
70 B&M European	573.8	+6.6	590.6	295.5
186 Bodycote	676.5	+41.5	715.0	440.4
5 BP	500.8	+25.2	567.6	340.1
174 Bridgepoint	174.1	+5.9	303.4	166.9
8 British American Tobacco	2608.0	+19.0	3509.0	2484.5
11 British Land	314.5	+0.6	471.4	297.3
132 Britvic	876.5	+28.5	936.0	707.5
39 BT	115.4	+3.0	160.4	112.0
44 Bunzl	2850.0	+126.0	3225.0	2664.0
52 Burberry	2182.0	+15.0	2641.0	1636.1
197 Bytes Technology	482.0	+2.2	541.5	359.2
152 Caledonia Investments	3300.0	-90.0	4065.0	3015.0
200 Capital Gearing	4555.0	+40.0	5130.0	4460.0
37 Carnival	1111.0	-11.0	1356.5	501.4
49 Centrica	153.6	+6.8	153.6	67.4
190 Close Brothers	822.0	+22.0	1131.0	796.5
51 Coats	76.7	+4.7	79.0	50.9
50 Coca Cola HBC	2253.0	-20.0	2565.0	1840.0
15 Compass	1972.5	-26.5	2235.0	1788.5
126 Computacenter	2166.0	+92.0	2474.0	1810.0
77 Convatec	230.8	+0.6	248.6	196.7
149 Cranswick	3360.0	+118.0	3400.0	2586.0
66 CRH	4550.0	+42.0	4674.0	32558.3
55 Croda	5566.0	+174.0	7218.0	5196.0
120 Darktrace	370.0	+24.9	514.8	210.2
88 DCC	4322.0	+127.0	5066.0	4030.0
84 Decbra Pharmaceuticals	3810.0	+14.0	3810.0	2520.0
140 Derwent London	1834.0	+13.0	2726.0	1812.0

Market cap ranking	Price	Change on week	52-week	Mkt Cap
▼			high low	(£m)
7 Diageo	3200.0	-67.5	3857.5	3200.0
89 Diploma	3134.0	+16.0	3308.0	2226.0
136 Direct Line Insurance	158.8	+1.4	235.3	133.9
160 Domino's Pizza	392.6	+6.2	424.6	215.2
165 Dr Martens	156.5	+3.0	292.4	115.1
135 Drax	547.2	-12.4	750.0	473.4
86 DS Smith	312.9	+19.7	368.5	241.8
128 Dunelm	1145.0	+24.0	1275.0	670.5
106 EasyJet	425.0	+12.6	528.0	285.1
94 Endeavour	1620.0	-5.0	2184.0	1461.0
138 Enneagram	1154.0	+33.0	1569.0	995.0
99 Entain	1153.5	-2.5	1587.5	1083.0
22 Experian	2768.0	+56.0	3160.0	2552.0
169 Fever-Tree Drinks	1283.0	+24.0	1458.0	821.5
23 Flutter Entertainment	14420.0	+330.0	16725.0	9644.0
170 Alimprint	5140.0	+195.0	5350.0	3280.0
98 Frasers Group	908.0	+25.0	899.0	621.0
90 Fresnillo	569.2	+19.8	968.0	509.2
101 Games Workshop	10720.0	+100.0	11700.0	5690.0
168 Genus	2300.0	+2.0	2772.0	2132.0
10 Glenclare	427.1	+1.0	578.1	411.5
137 Glencore	865.5	+43.3	988.7	630.6
155 Grainger	232.2	+5.2	275.2	205.4
123 Grepps	2460.0	+30.0	2904.0	1673.0
9 GSK	1387.6	+13.6	1523.0	1296.0
18 Haleon	319.9	-7.8	353.5	246.1
53 Halma	2134.0	+56.0	2498.0	1974.0
193 Hammerson	23.9	-0.4	30.5	17.2
99 Hargreaves Lansdown	766.0	+12.4	949.6	740.8
156 Hays	105.9	+0.6	130.7	98.7
75 Hikma Pharmaceuticals	2173.0	+51.0	2205.0	1190.5
171 Hill & Smith	1792.0	+26.0	1810.0	893.0
102 Hiscox	1009.0	+18.5	1193.0	842.0
93 Howden Joinery	733.0	+30.0	759.2	480.9
3 HSBC	588.3	+0.5	654.9	442.2
127 IDS	242.3	+7.1	272.4	183.2
115 ICI Group	673.5	+6.5	836.5	632.5
96 IMI	1498.0	+20.0	1680.0	1071.0
33 Imperial Brands	1783.5	+12.0	2185.0	1695.0
107 Inchcape	768.5	+37.0	941.0	675.0
124 Indivior	1819.0	+65.0	7025.0	1365.0
41 Informa	736.4	+19.4	776.0	506.6
42 InterContinental Hotels	5970.0	+92.0	6044.0	4275.0
95 Intermittent Capital	1353.0	+60.5	1511.5	953.2
54 International Airlines	159.4	+1.5	173.6	93.7
125 International Public Partnerships	130.0	+4.0	168.0	121.6
63 Intertek	4144.0	+11.0	4528.0	3619.0
109 Investec	467.5	+0.9	546.4	351.6
112 ITV	70.6	+1.7	90.1	55.2
154 IWG	174.8	+1.2	197.7	115.4
56 JD Sports	144.1	+5.1	186.6	89.2
105 Johnson Matthey	1790.5	+247.5	2373.0	1543.0



Follow us on Twitter @TimesMoney

Scrimping — to pay the school fees

Waitrose or Lidl? The Alps or a staycation? Parents are cutting back as costs rise sharply. *Lily Russell-Jones* reports

Parents are going to great lengths to ensure that their children can have the best education as the cost of private schooling soars. Julie Davis, 48, will stop at nothing to keep sending her son Alfie, ten, to private school. She has been cutting back on holidays and shopping for luxuries, and is selling a flat so she can afford fee increases. From this month Davis will pay £4,800 a term to send her son to a private primary school near Woodford in east London, up from £4,000 a term last year. Davis is contending with higher bills too. A year ago her mortgage cost £300 a month; now she pays £900.

“I have swapped Waitrose for Aldi, Lidl, Morrisons and Tesco,” Davis said. “Last year I took Alfie on a skiing holiday in France, but this year we visited my family in Sunderland. I have been trying to get into that mindset of knowing I already have everything I need.” Davis knows that when Alfie joins a senior school the fees are likely to jump to about £8,000 a term. She has cut back on shopping for clothes in central London and has stopped using the app Vestiaire Collective, where you can buy used designer clothes and accessories. Davies, who runs a property management company, also plans to sell a flat on the Isle of Dogs. She expects that she will be able to take about £150,000 out of the business after the sale.

“I want to give him the best start in life possible. Then he can choose what he wants to do when he is older,” she said. “There are lovely facilities at his school. There is a library, drama, music. He is in the rugby squad and football squad and the children can have dance lessons.”

This year fees for a private day school jumped 5.8 per cent on average. It would now cost about £800,000 on average to send three children to a private day school between the ages of five and 18, analysis by the digital wealth manager Moneyfarm shows. Many parents are having to rein in their spending or are relying on help from grandparents.

Some 77 per cent of wealthy people are supporting their adult children financially, according to a survey by the financial planner Saltus Wealth of people with more than £250,000 of assets. Of those, 32 per cent said they were covering education costs such as school fees, making it the main reason people were giving money to their adult children.

“Middle-class families used to send their children to private school – doctors and bankers would be able to afford the fees fairly comfortably on their salaries. As school fees have escalated it is increasingly something that only the ultra-rich can afford. Lots of families are stretching themselves financially to get their children



Pupils at Eton. Below: Julie Davis with her son Alfie, ten

“Last year we went skiing in France. This year we visited family in Sunderland

through the private school system,” said Alice Haine from the investment platform Bestinvest.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

Day school fees are £5,552 on average per term, or £16,656 a year, according to the Independent Schools Council. Boarding schools are pricier. It is £13,002 a term on average if your child boards, up 5.2 per cent compared with 2022. Sending a child to Eton costs £16,666 a term, which works out at £49,998 a year. You would also pay a £400 registration fee and a £3,200 acceptance fee for a child joining this year.

If Labour wins the next election it plans to add VAT to school fees, removing their charitable status, which could mean fee increases of 20 per cent.

Julie Robinson, chief executive of the Independent Schools Council, said: “Schools are not immune to the cost of living pressures affecting

people across the country. Wages, food and energy bills have all increased, along with the costs associated with buildings and maintenance. For some schools energy costs have increased by between six and ten times.”

If you wanted to send your child to a private day school between the ages of five and 18 it would cost you about £265,404, according to Moneyfarm. It assumed you would pay £5,108 a term when your child joined a private school in year one, £6,848 in the first year of senior school and £8,575 in the first year of sixth form. It assumed these fees would increase 4 per cent each year.

Sending two children to private school between the ages of five and 18 would cost £530,808, and three children would cost £796,212, the firm said.

“There’s no doubt these figures are daunting, but with careful consideration and planning it is possible to save for your child’s education,” Chris Rudden from Moneyfarm said. “The key is to start investing early, which is why people in their twenties would be well advised to take the plunge even before children come along. The reality is that most people will probably need to seek help from grandparents.”

If you wanted to save enough money to send a child to private school from five to 18 you could deposit £20,000 in a stocks and shares Isa. You would need to contribute a further £500 a month over 20 years to save £273,747, Moneyfarm said. This assumes 5 per cent annual investment growth after fees.

If you made an initial deposit of £20,000 into an Isa and put away £1,666 every month, the maximum amount allowed, you would have about £776,040 after 20 years with the same

growth assumptions. This means you would need to find an extra £20,172 to send three children to a private school.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

You could send your children to a fee-paying school for part of their education. For example, if your child started in year one this September you would save about £52,481 by moving them from a private school to a free school for sixth form, analysis by Moneyfarm shows.

“People who can no longer afford private school are pulling out their children once they have got through their GCSEs. Universities no longer favour private school students in the same way they did in the past, so pupils could go through the state system to

apply instead,” Haine said. If your children board you could enrol them as day pupils instead. Megan Jenkins from Saltus said: “We are seeing more parents move closer to their school so the children can attend as a day pupil.”

Many families are relying on help from grandparents. “This can be a useful estate planning strategy, and it allows families to see the immediate benefit of their wealth being shared,” said Henrietta Grimston from the wealth manager Evelyn Partners.

If you give away money or assets it is typically exempt from inheritance tax if you live for seven years after the gift. Giving money to grandchildren through a trust arrangement is common. You can ensure that the funds are being used for a specific purpose such as school fees.

Johanna Noble Money Editor

Hear, hear for NS&I’s 6.2% table topper (but you need to act fast)



After years in the doldrums, with savings accounts paying next to nothing, savers are finally having, if not a whale of a time, at least a much better one.

Average savings rates are now 2.96 per cent for easy-access accounts and 5.35 per cent for one-year fixed-rate bonds, according to the data provider Moneyfacts.

While many banks fight to be top of the best-buy tables, there is one institution that has been happy to linger midway: the government-backed bank NS&I.

Rather than great savings rates, the institution is better known for its Premium Bonds, so loved by millions of savers. This is where you are in with the chance of winning tax-free prizes of up to £1 million every month. It’s also touted as a safe haven for your cash because all NS&I deposits are guaranteed by the Treasury – not just the

first £85,000 per bank or building society if you’re with a commercial bank.

So safe, yes, but a bit middle-of-the-road – until now. On Wednesday NS&I increased the fixed rate on its one-year guaranteed growth bond to a chart-topping 6.2 per cent, and its one-year guaranteed income bond to 6.03 per cent.

These are now the best one-year bonds on the market and the highest rates NS&I has offered since it

launched the bonds in 2008. It’s not often I would single out one particular account or bank, but with table-topping rates and a government guarantee this is like Black Friday and the Boxing Day sales combined for keen savers.

The only snag: the accounts won’t last for long.

NS&I has set these rates to hit its target. This year it is tasked with raising £7.5 billion and it’s already £400 million behind schedule, so it’s hardly surprising it has upped its game. With those rates it won’t take long for NS&I to get the influx of cash it wants. Once that happens the rates are likely to be pulled.

When Castle Trust launched a table-topping one-year bond in July, paying 6.2 per cent, it lasted just six hours before being withdrawn. The NS&I accounts, at the time of going to press, have already

been around for longer.

Cynics might point out that the launch of the NS&I account came the day before the deadline imposed by the regulator, the Financial Conduct Authority, for any banks still paying rock-bottom interest rates to justify them or face punishment. The FCA gave banks until August 31 to start passing on rising rates to savers – those that don’t will have to explain how they offer fair value.

Our analysis, with the data firm Savings Champion, last week found that 45 of the 258 easy-access accounts on sale just five days before this deadline still paid less than 2 per cent.

Could NS&I’s headline-grabbing offering be the one that finally spurs its rivals to up their game? Hopefully so. In the meantime it’s up to you to vote with your feet and move your money to a better-paying account.

“One best-paying bond lasted just six hours

LIONTRUST GF SUSTAINABLE FUTURE US GROWTH FUND

UNITED SUSTAINABILITY OF AMERICA

Liontrust GF Sustainable Future US Growth Fund invests in some of the world’s most innovative companies. The Fund has a mid-cap bias, seeks to benefit from the growth potential of sustainability in the US and be differentiated from the index and other US funds. The Liontrust Sustainable Investment team has a track record of more than two decades investing sustainably in the US.

Past performance is not a guide to future performance. This advertisement should not be construed as advice for investment. Do remember that the value of an investment and the income from it can fall as well as rise and you may not get back the amount originally invested.

For more information visit us at liontrust.co.uk/us

CAPITAL AT RISK

This is an advertising document approved and issued by Liontrust Fund Partners LLP (2 Savoy Court, London, WC2R 0EZ), authorised and regulated in the UK by the Financial Conduct Authority (FRN 518165). Before making an investment, you should familiarise yourself with the different types of specific risks associated with the GF Sustainable Future US Growth Fund at www.liontrust.co.uk

LIONTRUST

COURAGE · POWER · PRIDE

Millions were lost after a string of company failures – why didn't the regulator act sooner asks *Ali Hussain*

In 2012 a financial adviser persuaded Simon Nuttall, a forklift truck driver, to transfer £35,000 of his life savings to a self-invested personal pension (Sipp) company called Berkeley Burke. Nuttall hoped it would boost his retirement income by allowing him to invest in more adventurous assets. Seven years later his investments, in storage pods in the north of England, were deemed worthless, and Berkeley Burke went bust after a series of mis-selling claims. Under the supervision of the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), the City regulator, Berkeley Burke's book of clients was acquired by Hartley Pensions, another Sipp firm. Last year Hartley went bust after the FCA discovered "serious operational, financial and regulatory issues" including the unauthorised transfer of millions of pounds of client funds to its parent company Wilton UK (Group), which is also now in administration. Police are investigating and the administrators have uncovered millions of pounds of missing funds from Hartley's accounts. Nuttall, 59, is not alone in seeing his pension company go bust twice within the space of three years. Between 2018 and 2021 Hartley acquired the business from five failed pension companies – Berkeley Burke, GPC, Guinness Mahon, Greyfriars and Lifetime – in some cases with the encouragement of the FCA, according to internal company documents seen by The Sunday Times. Over this period Hartley grew from 1,500 customers to 20,000, holding about £2.3 billion of savers' money. The experience of Hartley's customers exposes Britain's broken pension system. Unscrupulous and sometimes fraudulent advisers have been allowed to persuade ordinary investors to pour their life savings into high-risk schemes. Sippes have been around since the 1990s, but were intended only for sophisticated investors happy to manage their own retirement funds. They allow you to invest in high-risk, unregulated products that large, traditional pension companies would not touch. There were only a handful of Sipp firms in the 1990s, but today there are dozens holding £205 billion of pension assets for 1.7 million consumers, who pay an annual fee to the Sipp provider. The Sipp provider takes no responsibility for decisions made by its customers, however. Those are the responsibility of the client and their adviser. This gave pension advisers and unregulated salesmen the chance to drum up business for Sipp firms. British Steel workers were one example. Members were persuaded to transfer out of final salary pensions into high-risk Sipp schemes, many of which went wrong. The Sunday Times has warned about the use of Sippes by inexperienced investors since 2019, but the problem persists.

HOW COULD THE REGULATOR LET IT HAPPEN? The FCA wrote to Sipp firm bosses in 2020 reminding them of their duty of care to customers and how they may inadvertently facilitate pension scams. An update published in May this year warned them of the risks of using unregulated introducers.



Clichés, on the whole, are pretty true, which is a cliché in itself. As you are reading the excellent Money section, let us consider how many of the clichés about money are true or false.

1 A fool and his money are soon parted
I consider myself a tightwad and very good with money, but a few years ago, not long after my wife died, I had for a while a rather glamorous girlfriend. She wanted to add another room to her Brighton house so she could take in a lodger. On her birthday I gave her a large cheque for all the money. I still can't believe it. Me, of all people. Not long afterwards we parted.

2 You can't take it with you
I am going to try, what's left of it. In heaven they must have banks or cash machines. Or I shall leave it under the bed for when I return.

3 Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise
While you are wise if you go

to bed early, as for making money when sleeping, you have to be in the City to do that. But going to bed early definitely makes you healthy, which is why I go to bed at nine each evening, unless there is football on. Plus I have a 45-minute kip after lunch each day. Now look at me, what a rich hunk.

4 A good name is better than riches
True, but if you have riches you can buy a good name. All you have to do is contribute to the right charities and right political parties and, bingo, you are a lord.

5 Health is wealth
Spot on. Such a shame you can't pass it on or put it in the bank for a rainy day.

6 Money doesn't make you happy
Alas, not true. I did a book once about lottery winners, interviewing 20 of them over a year. All but one was happier at the end of the year than before. Stands to reason. So many of people's problems are money-related. If you suddenly have money these problems are sorted. But it is also true that money does not change your character. You can still be depressed and mean and a miserable old sod, even with money.

7 Where there's muck there's money
Once again, look in the City!

8 Money has no smell
Oh, it does. Have you ever been to a City wine bar?

9 Money often costs too much money
Right there, squire. "Getting and spending we lay waste our powers," as William Wordsworth wrote in 1807. Struggling to get money can take over your life. As for borrowing money, have you seen the mortgage rates?

10 Time is the only true currency
True, I suppose, but pretty pointless. You can't compare them. But, given the choice, I would like more time than more money.



11 The best things in life are free
Hmm, my New Zealand Marlborough sauvignon blanc habit is currently costing me a fortune. OK then, the real best things don't have a price, such as being in nature, going for a walk, sitting doing nothing, looking at the view, holding hands, waking up each day and finding yourself still alive.

12 Money doesn't grow on trees
Come on, we know where it comes from today. It comes from the Bank of Mum and Dad – or more likely Grandma and Grandpa.

13 Money makes money
Pretty true. Having money is the quickest way to make money. The rich get richer while the poor get poorer, including the poor old struggling middle classes, who are having a jolly hard time with school fees, sauvignon blanc prices, the cost of their holiday home in Cornwall/the Lake District/Spain/the Algarve. Please don't weep.

14 Money isn't everything
But it does seem like it, at the time, if you have no money and have five screaming kids, no husband and no food.

15 Money makes the world go round
Rubbish, TikTok does that. In fact the world has been round for ever, long before Columbus got to the new world in 1492. What money does, all round the world, is act as a lubricant, oiling and sometimes spoiling everything.

16 Money can't buy me love
Oh, weren't the young Beatles so romantic, back in 1964. Roughly true, money can't buy you love, but it can buy a lover, a young hunk or a real stunner, who will love you – until the money runs out.

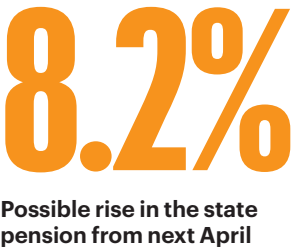
17 Look after the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves
No one does that any more. You can pick up discarded pennies from most pavements. I do it all the time, especially from the floor of buses. That is why I am so rich. As for pounds, what are they, remind me? Cash is useless these days.

18 Money matters
It would be hard to disagree with that. But it is not true that it matters most in life. What matters most in life is love, family, health and happiness. The greatest of which is love.

Ali Hussain
Pensioners are £100 a week richer in real terms compared with 20 years ago, according to analysis of government figures. The average weekly income after housing costs was £250 in 2002 but rose to £349 last year after taking account of inflation. The data includes changes to the state pension and other state benefits such as the winter fuel allowance, which accounts for £56 of the increase. Pensioners also enjoyed a £90 increase in workplace and private pension income on average, according to analysis by the investment platform Interactive Investor. The data highlights the benefit of the pension triple lock, which was introduced by the coalition government in 2010. It ensures that the state benefit is increased by the highest of average wage growth, 2.5 per cent, or inflation as measured by the Consumer Prices Index the previous September. The state pension could rise 8.2 per cent in April if the rise in wages in the three months to July, the period used to access wage rises, remains as high as it was in the three months to June. This would take it to £220.56 a week from £203.85 today.

Last year the benefit increased 10.1 per cent because of high inflation. In 2002 pensioners received the equivalent of £128 a week under the previous system. There have been growing calls to scrap the triple lock and to divert resources to younger families facing

soaring mortgage and childcare costs. The triple lock is expected to cost the government about £9 billion next year. Alice Guy, the head of pensions and savings at Interactive Investor, said: "The triple lock and the introduction of a more generous state pension system in 2016 have both significantly boosted state pension incomes." The data also exposes a growing pension wealth divide between those who rely on state benefits and those who have built up a workplace and private pension. Although fewer people benefit from generous defined benefit pensions, which pay set income for life, more people pay into a workplace pension since auto-enrolment rules were introduced in 2012. These require employers to automatically enrol workers into contributing to a workplace pension. "The figures highlight the importance of workplace and private pension saving as a key part of retirement income," Guy said. "On average, pensioners' workplace pension income almost matches the level of their state pension and benefit income, and they would struggle to live on the state pension alone."



Compensation paid to savers who lost money in firms bought by Hartley Pensions. More claims are ongoing

“When you invest in a scheme you think it will be well regulated”

Meet the savers who lost their pensions. Twice



Simon Nuttall invested £35,000

internal Hartley Pensions document, seen by The Sunday Times, states that one of the acquisitions was on the request of the FCA, and that throughout the period of acquisition there was "regular interaction with the regulator". This relationship appears to have been "positive" at the time, but it broke down last year when the FCA discovered serious problems with Hartley's management of client funds, including transfers to Wilton UK (Group) without customer consent. In February 2022 "serious operational and regulatory issues" at Hartley led the FCA to impose a number of restrictions

on the firm, including stopping it from taking on more money from clients. This precipitated its failure in July 2022. In a rare public censure, the regulator warned investors about messages sent to savers from Tony Flanagan, 57, the boss of Hartley Pensions and an Irish national, without the agreement of the administrators or the FCA. Flanagan had made "factual inaccuracies which may have caused customers concern". Flanagan has been asked by administrators to step down as a director of multiple Hartley-related businesses to reduce administration costs, but he has refused. Flanagan remains an "approved" individual on the FCA register.

HOW THIS AFFECTS YOU
When investments go wrong or are proved fraudulent, savers can lodge a claim with the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS), which pays compensation of up to £85,000 if a regulated firm holding your money, such as a Sipp, goes bust. Payments are funded by the industry but ultimately paid for by all pension savers and investors through fees. The FSCS has paid more than 5,500 claims totalling £208 million in relation to four of the five Sipp firms acquired by Hartley.

Another 173 claims are in progress. Nuttall received £35,000 compensation from the FSCS in 2021 for the failure of Berkeley Burke. He and others may be due further compensation under new rules from 2022, which allow further claims where an unregulated introducer has persuaded someone to transfer money to a Sipp. The FSCS started processing claims in the past few weeks. Nuttall submitted a claim in July. He was persuaded to transfer his savings from a Standard Life pension to Berkeley Burke by an unregulated adviser called Jackson Francis Limited. Calculations by Standard Life show that had he not done this, his pension would be double what he received in compensation from the FSCS. Jackson Francis went into administration in 2014 and is being investigated by the Serious Fraud Office.

WHERE'S THE MONEY?
Between February and June 2022, Hartley agreed with the FCA to stop taking on new business "due to serious operational, financial and regulatory issues". An internal FCA document, leaked first to the trade publication Money Marketing, revealed that the regulator was concerned about money transferred to

Wilton UK (Group) entities without customers' consent. Flanagan had reassured the FCA that any Wilton UK (Group) debts owed to Hartley could be repaid on request within 30 days, the report said. The FCA disagrees that it was a good enough commitment. The FCA restrictions prompted an internal review by Hartley, dated May 2022. It said the company used client funds to make certain investments without customer consent. "This constitutes a regulatory breach," the report, seen by The Sunday Times, said. It concluded: "In summary total withdrawals from Members, without consent, have been identified which total £37 million." The money was moved to a "segregated account of Wilton UK (Group)". It is understood that this money has been returned to Hartley. The latest administrator report, published last month, shows that £3 million is still owed to Hartley by Wilton UK (Group) companies. It was not clear why this was the case, or if the funds would be recovered. The report also identified transactions in Hartley's bank statements "which do not appear to have been for corporate expenses, but personal use". A source close to the administrator said £4.3 million of client funds appear to be missing – payments from Preston, Rochdale and Cheshire councils for the use of the storage pods held in the Sipp. The payments do not appear in the company's accounts. This has been reported to the FCA. Neither the regulator nor the administrator would comment on this.

WHAT THE REGULATOR SAYS
The FCA said it considered the acquisition of each Sipp business by Hartley Pensions, and had determined that it was the best outcome for clients at that time. It denies that it encourages firms to make acquisitions, but said it does question firms about their plans. The FCA said the unauthorised transfers of Hartley funds to Wilton UK (Group) companies happened before the issues leading to the failure of Hartley Pensions had occurred. "We've taken action over many years to protect consumers investing in Sippes and to stop and punish wrongdoers," said an FCA spokesman. "In addition, when we identified serious issues with Hartley, which occurred after its acquisitions were agreed, we acted to protect investors. The acquisitions were not subject to FCA approval. "We are engaging regularly with the administrators to seek to ensure the best outcome for consumers." UHY Hacker Young declined to comment.

POLICE INVOLVEMENT
Isle of Man police are investigating Wilton Group Limited, the parent company of Wilton UK (Group) which is based on the Isle of Man. In a separate court report at Leeds High Court business and property division, on a matter relating to the administration of Hartley and Wilton UK (Group), the judge refers to a letter issued to the court by lawyers representing Flanagan "in a criminal matter concerning the Financial Conduct Authority". No further details are provided. The Serious Fraud Office is seeking information from people who were persuaded to transfer funds by unregulated introducers including Jackson Francis. This is part of Operation Hazel, launched in 2017, in relation to other Sipp firms. Lawyers representing Flanagan, the group chief executive of Wilton, said he had engaged openly and fully with the FCA from an early stage and continues to co-operate with its investigation into "perceived regulatory issues with the wider Wilton group of companies".

The plight of the timeshare prisoners

Everlasting contracts trapped people in leases they couldn't afford, but there's a way out, reports Eugene Costello

Many of the UK's half a million timeshare owners are locked into unfair contracts – and it could be their children who carry on paying the price. In 2003 my parents visited friends at their timeshare resort in Madeira. The friends took my parents, at the time both aged 70, to a presentation, where they bought a 25-year timeshare for £20,000.

A timeshare is a type of holiday ownership that lets you – either directly or through a club – spend a week or specified weeks in a holiday resort each year for the duration of the contract.

Dad, who had been a teacher, and Mum, a former nurse, dreamt of taking their grandchildren to the two-bed apartment overlooking the gardens of the Pestana Village Resort in Funchal. They could use the property for two weeks a year but had to give 13 months' notice to book. They also paid up to £650 per year for maintenance.

But because Mum became ill, first with rheumatoid arthritis, then Alzheimer's, they only visited three times. In 2018 my younger brother tried to negotiate a cancellation to get them out of the contract. He died before he could achieve this.

When Mum died in April, Dad asked if I could help. He was tied into the timeshare for another five years and was being chased for four years of maintenance fees. I contacted European Consumer Claims (ECC), a timeshare claims

and relinquishment company, which is a UK business with an office in Malaga. It was able to get my dad out of the contract with the timeshare group Pestana.

Pestana acted reasonably. We were told that the contract could be cancelled in circumstances such as ill health or financial problems. We sent a copy of my mum's death certificate, signed a "relinquish letter" and the contract was ended.

But it is not always this easy. Last year a parliamentary research group paper found that many timeshares in the 1980s and 1990s were "sold aggressively to British tourists" who had no access to independent legal advice.

"Some contracts were not written in English and included an obligation to pay expensive annual management and maintenance fees," it said. Agreements were often made "in perpetuity", locking the owner in for life – and after they die their children too.

There are between 500,000 and 600,000 UK timeshare owners, the parliamentary report found. Almost half of these are in Spain, a fifth in the UK and a quarter outside of Europe. Selling timeshares is not easy because there is often little demand. Older owners stuck with a timeshare may struggle to cover expensive maintenance costs in retirement.

In perpetuity contracts have become rare and Spanish law now states that timeshare contracts signed after January 15, 1999, cannot last more than 50 years, but many people are still signed up to them. It is not known how many in perpetuity contracts were handed out, but Mark Jobling from ECC said: "It is exceptionally rare to find customers who are happy with the contract and maintenance fees."

Steven John from ECC said: "Europe's timeshare firms have run roughshod over consumer rights for decades."

Douglas Mackay, 65, a retired police-



EDUARDO RAMOS CASTANEDA/GETTY IMAGES



man, and his wife, Linda, 62, a retired nurse, from Ayrshire, signed a timeshare contract in 2012 with Infiniti Leisure for a property in Tenerife. They made a down-payment of about £5,000 and maintenance fees were about £1,000 a year but "kept creeping up", the Mackays said. After challenging the contract in 2018, the couple were able to get it voided and got £10,000 in compensation in 2020. It took two years because of all the legal obstacles set by Infiniti.

"We would have been happy to just get out of the contract. Neither of us thought we would get any money back," Douglas said. Infiniti did not respond to a request for comment.

In 2011 Andrew Rees, 57, a construction manager from Swinton, Greater Manchester, visited the timeshare resort complex Anfi del Mar in Gran Canaria.

On the recommendation of his holiday rep he attended a timeshare presentation. Rees didn't realise at the time that his tour operator, Thomas Cook,

had a financial agreement to be paid for each family who visited Anfi presentations, a high-pressure sales event. Rees signed up on the day for a timeshare. He paid about £5,000 for one week a year, with maintenance fees of £1,300 a year.

In 2020 he engaged ECC to get out of the contract and won compensation of £21,000. "I feel like we were manipulated into the decision to join Anfi. It's a huge relief to be free of the maintenance fee and to get our money back," he said.

Thomas Cook said the arrangement did not relate to the "new Thomas Cook", – Thomas Cook went into liquidation in September 2019, but the brand was relaunched as Thomas Cook Tourism by the Chinese holding company Fosun International in 2020. Anfi did not respond to a request for comment.

Barclays Partner Finance has come under fire for loans it gave to timeshare buyers in Malta, which were processed by the now defunct company Azure.

Investors claim they were pressured into buying timeshares by Azure and that

Eugene Costello's parents bought a timeshare in Madeira. Left: Andrew Rees

its commission-only salespeople were also the officers who handled the loan application process.

They have also alleged that standard affordability checks were ignored.

The specialist timeshare lawyer Adriana Stoyanova started working on behalf of investors in 2017, with the law firm MI Legal. In 2021 they reached a settlement with Barclays Partner Finance for it to refund all loan payments – a total of £48 million plus interest. It said it would cancel the loan agreements and remove any associated negative marks on investors' credit files.

In 2022 Barclays agreed to pay an extra £181 million to about 6,000 customers who were mis-sold timeshares in Malta by Azure.

So what can I do about it?

In perpetuity contracts and the practice of taking a deposit when agreeing a timeshare were made illegal in Spain in 1999, but both practices continued for some time. If you were pressured to sign up to a timeshare on the day and were not given access to legal advice you may be able to be relinquished from continuing maintenance fees. If you entered into a timeshare agreement in Spain with an in perpetuity clause after January 1999, you may also be eligible for compensation.

You could use a claims company to do this or try to do it yourself. However, negotiating the legal process, often in a foreign language, can make it difficult.

ECC typically charges between £3,000 and £6,000 to assist and in some circumstances may be engaged on a no-win, no-fee arrangement. More information is available through the Timeshare Consumer Association, an advice firm.

"The reality is that, especially in Spain, but elsewhere, these rogue operators know that the game is up and it is only a matter of time before their businesses are out of action," John said.

Best Buys

CURRENT ACCOUNTS

CREDIT INTEREST

Provider	Account name	Account fee	Reward	Balance (for reward)	Contact
Halifax	Reward Current Account	None	£5 a month	–	0345 720 3040
TSB	Spend & Save Plus	£3 a month	£5 a month	–	0345 975 8758
Nationwide	FlexDirect	None	5% AER	Up to £1,500	0800 30 20 10

OVERDRAFTS *

Provider	Account name	Account fee	Interest rate ¹	0% overdraft limit	Contact
Starling Bank	Current Account	None	15%	£0	starlingbank.com
First Direct	1st Account	None	39.9%	£250	0345 600 2424
Virgin Money	M Plus Account	None	19.9%	£0	0800 678 3654

¹ Equivalent annual rate.
* Based on overdraft of £500 for 7 days a month.
Some accounts require minimum funding/direct debits to open or receive rates shown.
Source: moneyfacts.co.uk

CREDIT CARDS

INTRODUCTORY RATES

Provider	Card type	Introductory purchase	APR ¹	Reward	Contact
Barclaycard	Platinum Allrounder V	0% for 23 months	24.9%	No	0800 151 0900
NatWest	Purchase & Balance Transfer MC	0% for 21 months	23.9%	No	0345 788 8444
Royal Bank of Scotland	Purchase & Balance Transfer MC	0% for 21 months	23.9%	No	0345 724 2424

BALANCE TRANSFERS

Provider	Card type	Introductory purchase	Transfer fee ²	APR ¹	Contact
Barclaycard	Platinum Transfer V	0% for 30 months	3.45% (no min)	24.9%	0800 151 0900
M&S Bank	Credit Card Transfer Plus Offer	0% for 28 months	2.99% (min £5)	23.9%	0800 997 996
Santander	Everyday Long-term BT MC	0% for 28 months	3% (min £5)	22.9%	0800 912 3123

CASHBACK CARDS

Provider	Card type	APR ¹	Cashback	Contact
American Express	Platinum Cashback	36.3%	0.75%-1.25%. Intro 5% for 3 months	0800 917 8047
American Express	Platinum Cashback Everyday	30.7%	0.5%-1%. Intro 5% for 3 months	0800 917 8047
Halifax	Cashback MC	22.9%	0.25-0.5%	0345 944 4555

¹ APR = annual percentage rate, dependent on credit rating. ² Fee charged on the amount of each balance transfer during the introductory period.
Source: moneyfacts.co.uk

SAVINGS ACCOUNTS

INSTANT ACCESS

Provider	Account name	Min deposit	Interest rate	Contact
Furness	Triple Access Saver (Issue 1)	£1	5%	furnessbs.co.uk
Shawbrook	Easy Access Account Issue 36	£1,000	4.93%	shawbrook.co.uk
Cahoot	Simple Saver	£1	4.9%	cahoot.com
Chip	Chip Instant Access Account	£1	4.84%	getchip.uk
Monument	Easy Access Savings	£25,000	4.81%	monument.co.uk

NOTICE ACCOUNTS

Provider	Account name	Notice period	Min deposit	Interest rate	Contact
Oxbury	180 Day Notice Account Issue 15	180 days	£1,000	5.59%	oxbury.com
Oxbury	120 Day Notice Account Issue 23	120 days	£1,000	5.53%	oxbury.com
The Tipton & Coseley BS	120 Day Notice Account	120 days	£25,000	5.5%	thetipton.co.uk
United Trust Bank	200 Day Notice Account Issue 2	200 days	£5,000	5.5%	utbank.co.uk
Cynergy Bank	Online Notice Saver — 120 Day Notice (Issue 7)	120 days	£500	5.45%	cynergybank.co.uk

FIXED-RATE BONDS

Provider	Account name	Term	Min deposit	Interest rate	Contact
NS&I	Guaranteed Growth Bonds — 1 year (Issue 72)	1 year	£500	6.2%	nsandi.com
OakNorth Bank	18 Month Fixed Savings Account	1.5 years	£1	6.05%	oaknorth.co.uk
OakNorth Bank	3 Year Fixed Savings Account	3 years	£1	5.96%	oaknorth.co.uk
Tandem (Raisin)	5 Year Fixed Saver	5 years	£1,000	5.85%	tandem.co.uk (raisin.co.uk)

DEALS ARE LISTED ONLY IF THEY ARE COVERED BY THE UK FINANCIAL SERVICES COMPENSATION SCHEME (FSCS) OR A EUROPEAN EQUIVALENT
Source: savingschampion.co.uk — 0800 011 9705

ENERGY DEALS

Table shows the cheapest tariff now available from the cheapest suppliers. Excludes tariffs of less than 12 months' duration, tariffs that do not have national coverage and tariffs where payments are taken in advance of supply.

Supplier	Average annual bill	Rate	Contact
So Energy	£2,047	Fixed	0330 111 5050
Octopus Energy	£2,062	Variable	0808 164 1088
Utility Warehouse	£2,069	Variable	0333 777 0777

*Phone numbers provided will call through to theenergyshop.com switch support team. Source: theenergyshop.com — 0800 448 0205

MORTGAGES

2-YEAR FIXED RATES

Lender	Rate	Scheme	Deposit	Fee	Notes	Contact
First Direct	5.94%	Fixed for 2 years	40%	£490	LV	0800 482 448
First Direct	6.09%	Fixed for 2 years	20%	£490	LV	0800 482 448
Leeds	6.44%	Fixed to 31.10.25	5%	£999	PV	0345 045 4049

3-YEAR FIXED RATES

Lender	Rate	Scheme	Deposit	Fee	Notes	Contact
Co-op Bank	5.66%	Fixed to 31.12.2026	40%	£999	BLV	0800 840 4980
Leeds	5.99%	Fixed to 31.10.26	15%	£999	LV	0345 045 4049
Nationwide	6.09%	Fixed for 5 years	10%	£999	PV	0800 302 010

LONG-TERM FIXED RATES

Lender	Rate	Scheme	Deposit	Fee	Notes	Contact
Principality	5.23%	Fixed to 30.11.28	25%	£1,395	V	0800 678 1000
Barclays	5.43%	Fixed to 31.12.28	15%	£899	PV	0333 202 7580
Yorkshire	5.6%	Fixed to 30.11.28	10%	£995	BPV	0345 166 9510
Nationwide	5.04%	Fixed for 10 years	25%	£999	LV	0800 302 010

TRACKERS */ DISCOUNTS

Lender	Rate	Scheme	Deposit	Fee	Notes	Contact
HSCB	5.39%	Tracker + 0.14% for 2 years	40%	£999	ERS	0800 494 999
Furness	5.64%	2.85% discount for 2 years	5%	£999	BV	0800 220 568
Newbury	5.09%	1.66% discount for 3 years	25%	£850	RS	01635 555700
Barclays	5.85%	Tracker+0.6% for 5 years	40%	£490	ELV	0333 202 7580

FIRST-TIME BUYER / LOW DEPOSIT

Lender	Rate	Scheme	Deposit	Fee	Notes	Contact
Cumberland	6.84%	Fixed to 01.10.25	5%	£0	FDV	01228 403141
Yorkshire	5.89%	Fixed to 30.11.28	5%	£995	BPV	0345 166 9510
Skipton BS	6.19%	Fixed to 30.11.28	0%	£0	FV	0345 850 1755

BUY TO LET

Lender	Rate	Scheme	Deposit	Fee	Notes	Contact
HSCB	5.92%	Fixed to 31.10.25	25%	£1,999	RS	0800 494 999
Principality BS	5.5%	Fixed to 30.11.28	30%	£1,395	V	0800 678 1000
Virgin Bank	5.38%	Fixed to 01.12.33	40%	£995	CR	0345 605 0050

Early repayment charge applies unless otherwise stated. * Must deals track Bank of England base rate. C = £500 cashback for purchases; E = No early repayment charge; F = £500 cashback for first-time buyers; H = Help to Buy; L = Free legal work for remortgages; M = £300 cashback for purchases; N = £250 cash back for purchases; O = £250 cash back; P = Purchases only; R = Free legal work and valuation for remortgages; S = Remortgage only; V = Free valuation
Source: landc.co.uk — 0800 373 300

CASH ISAs

INSTANT ACCESS

Provider	Account name	Min deposit	Interest	Transfers in	Contact
Cynergy Bank	Online Isa (Issue 41)	£1	4.55%	Yes	cynergybank.co.uk
Newcastle BS	Double Access Isa Issue 1	£1	4.5	Yes	newcastle.co.uk

FIXED RATE

Provider	Account name	Term	Min deposit	Rate	Transfers in	Contact
Shawbrook	1 Year Fixed Rate Cash Isa Bond Issue 80	1 Year	£1,000	5.78%	Yes	shawbrook.co.uk
Charter Savings Bank	2 Year Fixed Rate Cash Isa	2 Year	£5,000	5.78%	Yes	chartersavingsbank.co.uk

Source: savingschampion.co.uk — 0800 011 9705

CHILDREN'S ACCOUNTS

Provider	Account name	Account type	Min deposit	Interest rate	Contact
Saffron BS	Children's Regular Saver	Regular Saver	£5	5.8%	saffronbs.co.uk
Saffron BS	2 Year Fixed Rate Children's Bond	Fixed Rate Bond	£500	5.6%	saffronbs.co.uk
HSBC	MySavings	Easy Access	£1	5%	hsbc.co.uk

JUNIOR ISA:

Provider	Account name	Min deposit	Interest rate	Rate	Contact
Coventry BS	Junior Cash Isa 2	£1	4.95%	Variable	coventrybuildingsociety.co.uk
Skipton BS	Junior Cash Isa Issue 5	£1	4.75%	Variable	skipton.co.uk
Newbury BS	Cash Junior Isa	£50	4.65%	Variable	newbury.co.uk

Source: savingschampion.co.uk — 0800 011 9705



THE TOP FIVE ARTICLES ON TIMES MONEY MENTOR THIS WEEK

Our sister website Times Money Mentor has guides, tools and best buys to help you to manage your finances. Here's what you have been looking at:

1 Avoid the new Facebook scams

Facebook Marketplace lets people sell and buy items locally and is a popular way to purchase second-hand goods. We outline six scams to watch out for and what you can do if you are affected by one.

2 Your flight refund rights

An air traffic control failure caused chaos for thousands trying to fly home after the bank holiday. We explain what your refund rights are if your flight is cancelled at the last minute or delayed.

3 The best cash Isa rates

A cash ISA protects you from paying tax on any interest your savings earn and 14 Bank rate rises in a row make them an appealing option. We round up the best easy-access and fixed-rate cash Isas on the market.

4 How to handle the Ulez expansion

Millions of drivers now face paying a £12.50 per day charge for travelling into the capital. We explain how to work out if your car is Ulez-compliant and who can claim money for scrapping an old vehicle.

5 Investing to beat inflation

With even the best savings rates below the 6.8 per cent inflation rate, we explain how investing in stocks and shares could help you to make the most of your money.

thetimes.co.uk/
money-mentor

MONEY

We lost £10k when Aviva wrecked our Airbnb



QUESTION OF MONEY
JILL INSLEY

We own a house in Norfolk that has a separate annexe, which we let out through Airbnb. We have always been clear with our insurer, Aviva, that we do so. It is written into our policy documents.

The annexe recently suffered some flooding – water came up through the bathroom plug hole but it wasn’t a lot of damage. We submitted a claim to remediate the flood damage and were informed by our underwriter, Prestige, that it would appoint a loss adjuster, Sedgwick. Sedgwick informed us in writing that we would be covered, asked us to cancel all future Airbnb bookings and informed us we would be compensated fully for lost income. We cancelled future bookings worth £10,000, despite the property still being habitable.

Sedgwick then appointed multiple contractors and works have commenced. They have ripped up our floor and installed drying equipment, making the accommodation completely uninhabitable.

In the midst of all these works we were contacted by the underwriter to say that there was a problem with our claim. Apparently, the annexe is listed for business rates, not council tax, a situation we were unaware of at the time of taking out the policy. As a result of this our insurer has – mid-process – rejected our claim and said that we are not covered for lost income from the bookings it told us to cancel. We are now responsible for resolving the damage its contractors have caused.

I have recently lost my job and my wife is a full-time mum. We rely on the income from our Airbnb to keep us going. We would never have started this process, agreed to cancel our booking or allowed contractors to rip up our floor if we had known the insurer and underwriter had any issue

with the policy. We would simply have muddled on with a slightly damaged floor. Surely there is a requirement to fully validate the policy before commencing damaging works and telling us to cancel future bookings?

Sedgwick had ample opportunity to review our case, and had the full facts before making written commitments to us.

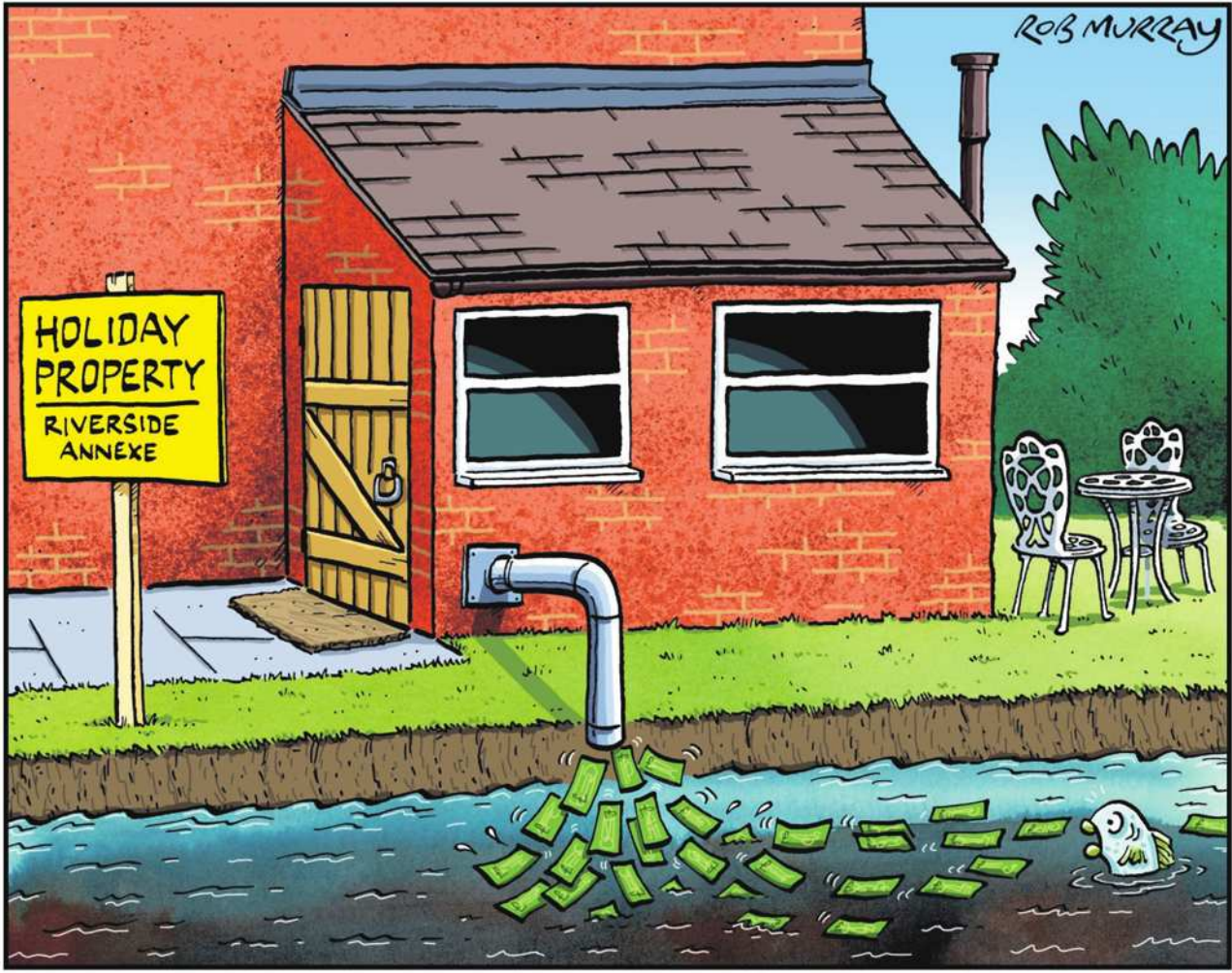
We desperately need the remedial work to be completed to get the Airbnb habitable again after all the damage that the insurance company’s contractors have caused, and to be compensated for our lost income. We have tried to follow the complaints procedure but it is slow, cumbersome and feels like it has a predetermined outcome. Please can you help us?

Jill replies
Although your house and contents insurer is Aviva, your property is next to a river and is considered at high risk of flooding, so Aviva “ceded” the policy to Flood Re, a joint government and industry not-for-profit scheme which keeps insurance premiums affordable for households in areas at high risk of flooding. Its insurance cover applies only to residential properties – this is stated in the terms and conditions. As the annexe is listed by the council as a business property for rating purposes, it is not covered by your insurance policy.

The way this error occurred is a classic miscommunication between husband and wife. You told me that when you set up the insurance policy, you asked your wife whether you, as a couple, pay business rates on the annexe. She quite accurately replied no, because the rates that apply to your annexe are fully discounted by small business rate relief. You don’t have to pay out anything at all – presumably because the annexe’s rateable value is less than £12,000, but the annexe is subject to business rates.

You said: “When I took out the policy and agreed to the wording, I did so in good faith, believing the statement of facts to be accurate.” As you pointed out, you have had the policy for two years and have paid more than £3,000 in premiums, which you most certainly would not have done if you knew the policy was invalid.

You sent me a very helpful timeline of what happened when. This showed that on June 3 Sedgwick pressed you to cancel the summer bookings so work



could start soon as possible. On June 12 you sent an email to Sedgwick that included details of the annexe business rates. This information had just been supplied by your wife and you had no idea it would invalidate your policy.

On June 27 you received written confirmation from Sedgwick that the claim was being upheld, and work started soon after. Four days later, after the floor and underfloor heating had been ripped up, the furniture damaged by the contractors and all your bookings cancelled, you were contacted by Prestige to say that the policy was not valid and that all work would cease, and you were responsible for any works to make it right. Prestige said it bore no responsibility for the damage caused and that it couldn’t help you any further.

I pointed out to Aviva that you had sent Sedgwick documents showing that your annexe was subject to business rates more than two weeks before it accepted the claim and started work. It wasn’t your fault no one checked the information they contained, and on that basis Aviva should complete the repairs the contractors had started.

Aviva and Prestige agreed to complete the repairs as if the property were covered by the policy, as the independent loss adjustor had instructed works to commence before confirming the insurance was valid.

Aviva has also agreed to cover the loss of rental income from the date the bookings were cancelled until all repairs are complete, amounting to more than

£10,000. It has also agreed to pay £750 in compensation.

That’ll be £3.5k for a day’s energy, says Octopus in a tangle

I have solar panels and a Tesla Powerwall – a large battery that stores electricity during peak hours and releases it when required at night and during power cuts (we have quite a few cuts in the village). A few years ago, I signed up to the Octopus/Tesla tariff, which charged a very generous rate of 11.1p per kWh and also paid me the same price for export. The condition of the scheme was that I had to pass full control of the import and export to Octopus, so it could charge the battery from the grid during the off-peak times and take it back during the day.

Octopus installed a smart meter to monitor the import and export, so there was no need for me to provide readings. Since I have solar panels, on many days I have been able to generate as much power as I use at the home – although my Tesla electric car does itself use quite a lot when on charge.

I hadn’t really been keeping an eye on my account, but I knew I was in credit continuously.

A few weeks ago, I was alerted to the fact that Tesla was discontinuing its

relationship with Octopus, so I was asked to swap to a new tariff. As I have an electric car and the Powerwall, I selected the “Intelligent Octopus” tariff, which charges 31.2p per kWh between 5:30am and 11:30pm and a very generous 7.5p per kWh outside of those hours. That looked fine, until my balance suddenly changed from being in credit to a very significant debit. I called Octopus on June 19 and a very helpful representative told me the additional charge was an error and she immediately corrected it for me. My account went back to being in credit.

All was fine until I noticed that the very large debit had been reapplied. The second representative to whom I spoke was not so helpful. She said that my account “was in a mess” and she couldn’t help but thought it might have something to do with my meter readings not having been properly recorded.

It’s possible that I have been undercharged, but it’s impossible to see where and why. If I do owe money, I would obviously like to have an explanation of how it has been calculated. Since on many days I export more than I consume, it does seem odd for such a large deficit to have arisen, even if I have been undercharged over the past 12 months.

Having changed to the new tariff, I also want to make sure my meter is working properly so I won’t have this same problem going forward.

Jill replies

On June 24 you were sent three bills ranging from £182 for three months, to £3,459 for just one day. By the time I asked Octopus to sort out your account, it was showing a positive balance of nearly £3,000 which you said was equally ridiculous.

The next day Octopus said it had resolved your billing issues and you were now almost £500 in credit. It told me that when you switched to its Intelligent Octopus tariff, its system treated your two-rate day and night meter as a single-rate meter. This made your usage look as though it had jumped significantly, and your bills rose accordingly. The meter mix-up also meant that your export rates weren’t included in the billing which made the size of the bills even worse.

It has paid £150 credit into your account in apology for the mix up, and is also installing second generation gas and electricity smart meters to replace your first generation smart meter.

The Morrisons vouchers with no redeeming features

This summer, Morrisons ran a promotion for its loyalty card holders. You had to spend £80 a week for four out of six weeks to receive a £30 credit voucher, called “Morrisons Fivers”. I did this, and received confirmation at the beginning of August that I had six £5 vouchers to spend at the shop. Unfortunately the vouchers, which appeared only on the Morrisons app, do not work when the card or app is presented at the shop. I asked one of the staff if she could print the app vouchers for use. She said that a software fault meant that the vouchers were not activated, that this was a common problem and her own vouchers didn’t work either.

I rang Morrisons customer services five times. Finally, last week I was told there was nothing that could be done, my name would be added to a spreadsheet which kept crashing, and it was an IT problem.

Jill replies

I hate supermarket schemes that encourage customers to spend more to “save”. One which then doesn’t fulfil its side of the bargain is just the pits.

I asked Morrisons to supply you with your vouchers and to correct its system so other customers would not lose out. Two days later the supermarket’s head office contacted you to say that your £30 of vouchers would work if you went shopping the next day, and it have given you another £30 credit for your trouble. It said the problem just affected the store at Crossmyloof, Glasgow.

You tested this out at the Crossmyloof Morrisons store last Saturday and both the £30 voucher and the £30 bonus voucher worked. You are giving £30 to charity to say thank you.

DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTION

Find your new favourite show

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

Sign up to the Times TV newsletter for the latest reviews and recommendations, the best box sets and exclusive insight from our critics straight to your inbox every Friday. Subscribers can sign up by going to ‘My newsletters’.

Try a digital subscription free for one month, go to thetimes.co.uk/trial or scan the QR code



THE TIMES
THE SUNDAY TIMES
Know your times

Offer available for new subscribers only. UK residents aged 18+ only. Pay nothing for your first month then £26 per month for the 7 day digital subscription. Visit store.thetimes.co.uk for full subscription T&Cs. This is not a time limited promotion. We reserve the right to change the subscription price with 30 days’ notice.

Sun, sea and an exceptional exchange rate for late holidaymakers as pound has its moment

Those who have waited until the end of the school holidays to book cheaper European trips can get more holiday cash as the pound has reached one of its highest values against the euro since before the 2016 Brexit referendum.

You can get £1.17 for every £1, which has risen from £1.16 at the start of last month and £1.13 in April.

Since 2016, when the pound fell in value against the euro, it has only traded stronger than this a handful of times, reaching a high of about £1.21 in February last year. Those heading to the US will get \$1.26 for £1, compared with \$1.07 last year. The pound has strengthened

against most currencies this year. This is because of expectations that the Bank of England base rate, which is now set at 5.25 per cent, will have to stay higher for longer to tame inflation. This week Huw Pill, the Bank’s chief economist, suggested that rates might not rise much higher, but could stay there for longer.

If you’re dreaming of warmer climes but haven’t booked a trip yet, you could get more bang for your buck by jetting off to a country outside the eurozone.

The collapse of the Egyptian pound means that £1 now buys 39.15 Egyptian pounds, compared with 22.30

last year – 76 per cent more. Those heading to Turkey can get 33.8 Turkish lira to the £1, up 60 per cent from 21.10 a year ago. The lira is now worth less than 14 per cent of its value ten years ago, according to the Post Office.

Ed Dutton from Post Office Travel Money said: “We advise holidaymakers to watch daily exchange rate movements

before booking and buy their holiday cash when they see sterling move up against the currency for their chosen destination.”

Whether you choose to buy holiday money before you go or use a card abroad, make sure you are getting the best exchange rate you can. Buying in advance will get you a better deal than if you wait until you’re at the airport terminal.

And if you’re abroad, you should always choose to pay in local currency because you will get a far better exchange rate than if the company or ATM converts it into pounds for you.

George Nixon

£1.17

What you get for £1. In April it would have bought £1.13

Watch out for scammers — they’re after your compensation payout, LCF victims warned

Customers of the collapsed investment company London Capital & Finance (LCF) have been urged to ignore letters from fraudsters purporting to be from the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS).

The letter to LCF customers, which uses FSCS headed paper, encourages them to get in touch to apply for more compensation after the liquidation of LCF assets. The FSCS said that this was a scam and people should throw away the letters.

It said that anyone worried that a letter might be a fake should contact the FSCS using the information given

on its own website. Its phone number is 0800 678 1100.

The FSCS is a consumer lifeboat scheme designed to protect your money if it is invested in a regulated financial services firm that goes bust. This includes banks and building societies.

Consumers can claim up to £85,000 per organisation

through the scheme. For example, if you had accounts with two separate banks and both failed, you would be covered up to £170,000.

LCF sold high-risk, unregulated mini-bonds to more than 11,600 people who ended up facing heavy losses on their investments when LCF went into administration in January 2019, owing £237 million to bond holders.

The Treasury said last November that the scheme set up by the FSCS to compensate LCF customers closed on October 31, 2022, a year after its launch. Almost all eligible bond holders have now received compensation

from a total of £115 million paid out by the scheme, the Treasury said. The FSCS can still pay outstanding claims, but only in exceptional circumstances.

The LCF scandal is one of the biggest to have hit savers in recent years, with many having put their life savings into the bonds.

The former chief executive of LCF, Michael Thomson, was sentenced to ten months in prison in March, suspended for two years, after he admitted concealing £95,000 from investigators that was used to fund his luxury lifestyle.

David Branchley

£237m

Total owed to bond holders when LCF went bust

FAME AND FORTUNE CATALINA KIM

In association with **Standard Life**
Part of Phoenix Group

‘Football is a boy’s club but one day I’m going to own a team’

The agent on brokering deals for Europe’s top clubs, receiving inappropriate messages and spending £100,000 on a Porsche. By **Nick McGrath**

The South Korean football commercial agent Catalina Kim was born and brought up in Seoul. After learning English and Spanish at an international school she got her first job in the fashion industry in Milan. In 2011 she started working in the economic department of the South Korean embassy in London, where she began to gain contacts in the football world. In 2013 she launched her own agency, C&P Sports, and now has offices in London, Frankfurt and Seoul. Kim describes herself as Europe’s only Asian football agent and brokers multimillion-pound deals between clubs in England, Germany, Italy and Spain. Last year Chelsea FC sacked Damian Willoughby as its commercial director after Kim revealed that he sent her inappropriate messages before the club employed him. She lives alone in Chelsea.

How much money do you have in your wallet?
I have two mobiles, so I use either Samsung Pay or Apple Pay for most of my spending. I carry about £100 in cash, which I’ll use for tips. I travel a lot, working from offices in Seoul and

London. About a quarter of my time I’m working in different countries, so I tend to have a variety of currencies in my bag, but I’ll always carry pounds, dollars, euros and South Korean won.

What credit cards do you use?
Ten years ago, when I first started travelling abroad a lot, I always had to carry the currency of that country. Now most countries accept all the credit cards, so I carry three. I live close to Harrods in London, so I have a Harrods Black card, plus an Amex Platinum and a British Airways card. I don’t like the pressure of feeling in debt so I keep a close eye on my spending and always make sure I pay my bills.

Are you a saver or a spender?
A bit of both. I consider myself lucky. I earn more than I need so am not necessarily a saver and I have money left over every month, but I just don’t have the time to spend much of it. So I do spend some but I also save some. But I’m just too busy to really consider how I feel about each purchase. When I do have the opportunity and desire to spend I just tend to buy as I don’t do shopping a lot. So when I do shop, I spend a lot on one particular day, then I’ll forget about shopping for the rest of the year.



“**I paid £25,000 for my Hermès Birkin – I’ve no idea why it cost so much**



Catalina Kim is bemused by her Hermès bag, but proud of brokering deals with Tottenham. Below: the club’s star player Son Heung-min and Kim with the former Spurs players Michael Dawson and Ledley King

along the way. Many people told me not to go public with the allegations against Damian Willoughby, Chelsea’s commercial director, as they thought it would be detrimental to my career, but that’s not been the case. Some people told me that I had to consider the people in the industry, but it’s a boys’ club and I wasn’t prepared to do that. Since the incident I’ve had a lot of personal messages of support. Maybe I did lose some friends by going public, but I think the friends I lost were the idiots.

Have you ever been really hard up?
My first job as an intern in the fashion industry in Milan was very badly paid. After paying rent for my tiny place and for groceries I had nothing left at all. I left Milan thinking that it was just a horrible, poverty-stricken place as that was my experience. It was only when I returned years later to do some work with AC Milan and Inter Milan, and experienced all the fancy restaurants, that I realised what a beautiful city it is.

Do you own a property?
I have a house in Chelsea and one in Seoul, plus a four-floor building in Seoul for my company offices.

Are you better off than your parents?
I think so. In South Korea the new generation are generally better off than their parents. Mine ran a traditional property business and I don’t think they have any idea what I do. They don’t understand things like fan engagement and enriching stadium experiences.

How much did you earn last year?
I can’t give you an exact number. When I was working in the fashion industry in Milan or for the South Korean embassy in London I was earning a fraction of what I earn today.
I’m in a very fortunate career and in the ten years since I started my agency my income has increased every year and I’ve been invited to get involved with bigger and bigger projects.

The past 12 months have been the most successful yet. The pandemic didn’t affect the growth of the business, even though crowds were not allowed in stadiums. The biggest deal I was part of was brokering the partnership between Kumho Tyres and Tottenham Hotspur for several million pounds, which is the longest partnership between a Korean corporation and a Premier League club.
Persuading Daniel Levy (the Tottenham chairman) was at the heart of the deal, and I know he has a reputation as a fearsome negotiator, but I didn’t find him scary at all. He’s just very specific about the number he’s willing to accept. There was a fair amount of negotiation to get the details right, but I respect that attention to detail. No, there wasn’t a clause specifying that a regular dinner with Son Heung-min [Tottenham’s South Korean star] was part of the deal.

How did the pandemic affect you?
It gave me the chance to write my book, *Agent Lady* [it is available only in Korean], and my entertainment and media work has consequently increased. I’m celebrating my agency’s tenth anniversary this year, but no offer would be high enough for me to sell it. I have ambitions to list it on the stock exchange.
I’m also part of a consortium to buy another English football club, which I’m hoping will come to fruition in early 2024, but there have been challenges



Do you invest in shares?
I don’t really buy general stocks and shares, but I have shares in my own company and I am hoping to use some of my own equity to buy another football club in the future. Would I buy Tottenham? If I was ever rich enough to do that I’d be very happy, but my current goal is working with other investors to buy a club – I can’t say which one right now. In ten years I hope to be in a position to buy a club by myself. Would I like to sit in Daniel Levy’s chair one day? You know how much trouble I would get into if I answered that.

What’s better for retirement – property or pension?
That’s a long way away for me, so I’ve not thought too much about it, but I think there might be a third way by then. In the future people may think that property and pensions are just boring, traditional ways to pay for your retirement. Cryptocurrency never existed before, so maybe something else completely new will emerge.

What’s been your best investment?
So far property, but in the future I hope my football club investment will overtake that.

And the worst?
I once invested in a food and drink start-up with a business partner, who I assumed knew more about the sector than I did. I realised that wasn’t the case and I lost a considerable amount of money. Not millions, but enough to make me adamant that I’ll never invest in the food and drink sector again.

What’s the most extravagant thing you’ve bought?
My Porsche for about £100,000 and my Hermès Birkin for almost £25,000. I understand why a Porsche costs that much, but I have to say that even after buying the bag I don’t understand why it costs that much. I was very happy when I first bought it, but, honestly, it’s just a bag.

What’s your money weakness?
Shoes. I’ve probably got close to a hundred pairs, which I know is too many as I don’t even wear most of them that much. There’s an area called Shoe Heaven in Harrods that is a very dangerous place for me.

What is your financial priority?
Raising enough money to buy a football club for myself.

What would you do if you won the lottery?
I wouldn’t want to spend it because it wouldn’t feel like I’d earned it. I would just feel like the money didn’t belong to me.

Do you support any charities?
C&P Sports offers scholarships to university students in South Korea, and I feel that as Britain has accepted me that I want to increase our charity work here too, so we’re working on developing some other charity initiatives.

What is the most important lesson you’ve learnt about money?
Know your own value. It’s up to you whether you choose to work for £10 an hour or £10,000 an hour. You can wait for a better chance. Be brave and wait for a better opportunity.



THE  TIMES
THE SUNDAY TIMES

Earth Summit

SUPPORTING PARTNER 

Tuesday, October 17, 2023



Scan the QR code to register your interest

If you would like the free weekly Money email bulletin, visit thesundaytimes.co.uk/moneybulletin. The bulletin is exclusive to digital subscribers

Contact us Money, The Sunday Times, 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF

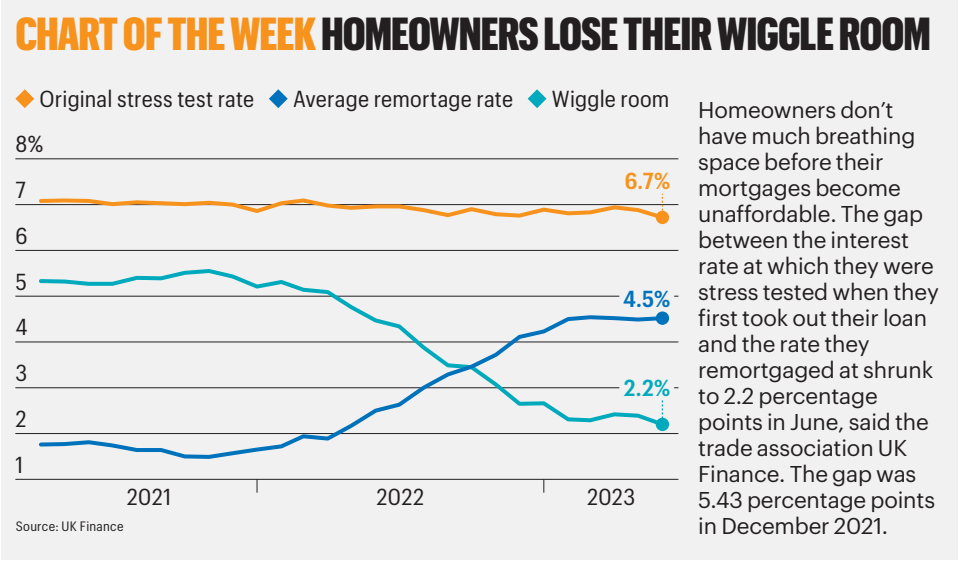
Advertising If you would like to buy an advertisement in Money, email paul.douglass@news.co.uk or call him on 07917 598422

0071

The number of scams impersonating the Financial Conduct Authority, the City watchdog, that have been reported this year

Don’t let the school run be a car crash

Lucy Alderson
Parents gearing up for the return of the school run this week have been advised to drive carefully because pick-up time on a Friday afternoon is the most likely time for a car crash.
There are more collisions between 3pm and 3:15pm on Fridays than at any other time, and that has been the case since 2020, according to the insurer Aviva.
The second most common time to have an accident was between 2pm and 2:15pm, followed by 4pm and 4:15pm, analysis of its claims data found.
A quarter of all car accident claims were for incidents between 2pm and 4pm, coinciding with peak school-run traffic.
Some 16 per cent of parents who drop off their children at school or nursery said that they had seen a collision, according to a survey by the insurer.
“September sees the return of the school run for much of the UK and there’s no doubt this is one of the most hectic parts of the day,” Alec Reeder from Aviva said.
Following the correct rules for yellow line road markings can help to avoid a prang or even a fine. Avoid parking close to junctions and keep an eye out for speed bumps, which are often found around schools and can damage your car if you drive over them too quickly.
Sharing lifts with other parents can help to reduce the number of vehicles on the road, which would reduce the likelihood of a collision, Aviva said.



How to spot subsidence – and what to do about it 6



Are 'blow-ins' to blame for Frome's housing emergency? 12



Julius Bahn
OAK BUILDINGS

FREE BROCHURE
& DESIGN SERVICE

03444 171 400
JULIUSBANH.CO.UK





COVER: NIGEL JARVIS/GETTY IMAGES. THIS PAGE: DARREN WOOLIDGE. OPPOSITE PAGE: CONNOR HITCHEN; TONY MURRAY PHOTOGRAPHY

MAKING MOVES

The best of this week's property on sale

Compiled by
**Property
team**

HOUSE OF THE WEEK

HAMPSHIRE

Although it looks like a historic country seat, with its Palladian pillars and Georgian-inspired façade, the Water House was built in 2010. The four-bedroom house sits in Steep, a secluded valley amid a Victorian water garden that's a seven-minute drive from Petersfield and five minutes from Bedales School. The kitchen has a Zaha Hadid mixer tap in the shape of a swan. [savills.com](https://www.savills.com)



£3.5M

Are you looking for a leisure home or second home?

NEW LUXURY LODGES



Medbourne Edge

Nestled within an absolutely breathtaking setting, our location offers tranquil views overlooking the picturesque Welland Valley in Leicestershire and is only 1 hour from Kings Cross to Market Harborough by train.

Call now to book your viewing (open 7 days a week)
on 01283 763300 or www.tomhartleyparkhomes.co.uk

Lodges from
£199,950





£360,000

NORTHUMBERLAND

A three-bedroom ground-floor flat that was part of Wylam Manor, the home of the Victorian architect Archibald Dunn. The property, ten miles from Newcastle-upon-Tyne, has 23 acres of gated gardens. **finestproperties.co.uk**



£465,000

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

A charming two-bedroom cottage with a wood-burning stove on Hemingford Grey's high street, a village four miles from Huntingdon. It has a garden with a paved terrace leading to a detached office. **cheffins.co.uk**

0/0
£780,000**ABERDEENSHIRE**

Dating from the 16th century, Balbegno Castle has a tower, spiral stairs and great hall, as well as five bedrooms and a three-bedroom cottage. It's in 20 acres near the village of Fettercairn, 13 miles from Montrose. **savills.com**



£3.25M

BATH

On Bathwick Hill, a quiet street in Bath, a grade II listed Georgian double-fronted townhouse has impressive views of the city. It has four bedrooms and a garden that backs onto the Kennet and Avon canal. **knightfrank.co.uk**



£565,000

HAMPSHIRE

Designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, 2 Victoria Cottages dates from 1896. The three-bedroom home is in Micheldever Station, a village built entirely around a railway station. It's a 15-minute drive to Winchester. **struttandparker.com**



£1.5M

LANCASHIRE

Old Rib Farm is a grade II listed Jacobean home dating from 1616. It's in Longridge, eight miles from Preston. The five-bedroom house's kitchen, with its three-oven electric Aga, is perfect for entertaining. **fineandcountry.co.uk**



£12.5M

LONDON SW1

A Manhattan loft-style penthouse in Knightsbridge's Cadogan Square that's rarely on the market, the three-bedroom home was redesigned by Louise Bradley. It has vaulted ceilings and Harrods views. **merchantsrow.co.uk**



£750,000

SWANSEA

A ten-minute walk from the sandy Port Eynon Bay beach on the Gower peninsula, this four-bedroom detached home has a wraparound balcony with sea views as well as gardens that envelop the property. **fineandcountry.com**

WHY TAXING SECOND-HOME OWNERS COULD BACKFIRE

The tiny violins were out in force this week after The Times revealed that a rise in French property tax will add to the “woes of second-home owners”. The 86,000 British households with property across the Channel are likely to face a huge increase in the residence tax, one of France's two main local taxes, after rural councils were given powers by President Macron to apply a surcharge.

No doubt Macron's aim when allowing for the rise is purely to help solve the French property crisis, and has nothing to do with trying to throw his political opponents a bone as he tries to force through unpopular pension reforms. But whatever the motive, say experts, they will likely accelerate a further sell-up from Britons giving up on their Gallic dream.

For many Britons with properties abroad – and particularly in France – it's already too much of a hassle and an expense. Figures released in July show that France had the biggest fall in second-home ownership among Britons on the Continent, with 60,000 today compared with 93,000 in 2012.

“**Clampdowns are a distraction from other problems**”

HOME TRUTHS

DAVID BYERS
Deputy
Property
Editor



Interestingly, any significant sell-up in France may have unexpected consequences for the housing crisis here, because homeowners selling their overseas properties seem to be replacing them with ones in Britain – during that 2012-22 period, the number of second-home owners with properties in the UK rose from 40 per cent to 55 per cent. The number of rural UK homebuyers has also been swelled by a surge in those leaving cities permanently during the pandemic.

Today my colleague Emanuele Midolo provides a window into the issues being faced by rural communities swamped by people fleeing cities for a better lifestyle (p12). London-leavers and holiday let renters will say, with some justification, that they are investing in rural economies, pumping their money into local restaurants and attractions. Some argue – rightly – that the government must share the blame for local housing crises by failing to build suitable homes, or create decent jobs.

It now seems clear that, as rural communities struggle to cope, tax clampdowns here are also becoming inevitable as local authorities take measures to protect their own housing stock and populations. However, there are unintended consequences with policies such as these.

Notably, Dorset council has taken a particularly hard line, earlier this year voting in favour of doubling council tax on second homes, although the implementation of the policy has been stalled for now.

If such an increase came into being, it may mean a big hike in council tax bills for residents of purpose-built second-home developments, such as Silverlake, which in many cases have served as useful regeneration projects for local communities.

Some homeowners have also warned that restrictive policies could cause house prices to plummet because of falling demand and push their homes into negative equity. As ever,

decisions should be taken locally, carefully and delicately and not – as seems to be the case with Macron – as a seemingly blunt instrument to distract from other problems.

Home

THE TWO ROBS

Your questions on being a landlord and investing in property answered

WHAT CAN I DO TO AVOID RENTAL REPOSSESSION?

I'm on the verge of losing a property I've owned for more than 20 years and I don't know what to do. I used to live there but moved out in 2013 to live with my partner and have rented it out ever since. My mortgage deal ended a few months ago, and my mortgage rate increased from 3.2 per cent to 7.74 per cent – which is more than I'm receiving in rent, even before any other costs.



Because I lost my job earlier this year no one else will lend to me, so I'm stuck with my lender's standard variable rate. I've been paying what I can, but I'm slipping further behind, and I know it's only a matter of time until they want to repossess. What can I do?
Anthony, Thame

You are not alone. According to UK Finance data, there are more than 10,000 buy-to-let mortgages currently in arrears and 440 repossessions in the previous quarter. You haven't said whether you've done this, but be open with the lender about your situation. It's not clear whether your loan would fall under the definition of "consumer buy-to-let", which would bring it within the scope of extra Financial Conduct Authority rules and protections, and the government has excluded buy-to-let loans from its Mortgage Charter. Regardless, lenders are required to abide by guidelines in situations where a borrower is struggling and will have internal policies about how to handle these cases. They would prefer to get

payments back on track than to repossess and will generally be open to forbearance measures – such as deferring payments, offering a payment holiday and adding arrears to the balance of the loan. More options will be open the earlier you talk to them. You haven't mentioned the option of a product transfer with your existing lender. These are processed without any need for affordability checks or extra underwriting, so could be a way to get off the painful standard variable rate. There's also the option of selling the property, if you have enough equity to clear the mortgage balance. You might be able to realise a higher price by selling it yourself than if the lender took it over to sell. That might be extreme if you just need to tide yourself over. Speak to the lender and consider getting help from a good independent mortgage broker too.

NEIGHBOURS ARE COMPLAINING ABOUT MY TENANTS' BARKING DOG

I've rented out a two-bedroom house to the same couple since 2019. During the pandemic they got a small dog, then asked for my permission to

keep it. I wasn't happy, but hardly felt I could tell them to get rid of their dog and didn't want to find new tenants when they're reliable payers and good tenants in all other respects. But now the neighbours are complaining to me that the dog barks at all hours. I've brought it up with the tenants who've apologised but said that the neighbours are exaggerating. The tenancy isn't within a fixed term so I believe I can ask them to leave – is that right? Even if I can, it's put me off allowing pets so I'm concerned about the new rules that will force me to allow them.
Barbara, Goole

It would be helpful to know whether you have a dog issue or a neighbour issue. Is the dog really barking as frequently as the neighbours said? Ideally, you'd be able to ask someone else for an opinion. If the dog does turn out to be the problem, you can bring the tenancy to an end by giving notice as it's not within a fixed term – if other attempts to resolve the situation fail. You could choose to give the tenants notice that you'll be forced to

do that unless the barking improves and give them an opportunity to remedy it. You're right that under the proposed Renters (Reform) Bill, landlords won't be able to unreasonably withhold a request for the tenant to keep a pet. Under a separate part of the legislation, you would also be unable to bring the tenancy to an end without being able to prove a certain "ground" for doing so – one of which is antisocial behaviour, but as drafted we doubt that a noisy pet would satisfy it. It's for reasons like these that landlords are so concerned about the incoming regulation, and many are choosing to sell. Focus on trying to resolve the issue, before worrying too much about the future – especially as more details about regulation will emerge as the Bill goes through the parliamentary process. Based on these, you can decide whether continuing to rent out is worthwhile to you.

Rob Dix and Rob Bence are the presenters of The Property Podcast

Submit your questions for the two Robs at propertyhub.net/sundaytimes



A UNIQUE LIFESTYLE WITHIN SOTOGRANDE

Set in the beautiful countryside in the heart of Sotogrande, Village Verde offers: a home set in a natural parkland, state-of-the-art amenities, sea and golf course views, close proximity and privileged access to La Reserva Club.

Consisting of two, three, and four-bedroom apartments and penthouses, Village Verde has brought a new lifestyle into one of Europe's most sought after destinations.

Enjoy the ultimate lifestyle in southern Spain, within easy reach of Marbella and Gibraltar. Prices from €850,000.

Request an information pack or a private tour
+34 856 560 922 · villageverde.residencial@sotogrande.com · villageverdesotogrande.com

DISCOVER MORE



SOTOGRADE®
ANDALUCÍA

RIVERSCAPE



Prices correct as at time of print.
*(Based on sole UK residence).

MOVE IN NOW

On the edge of the Thames, immersed in nature.

Surrounded by verdant parks & gardens with panoramic views towards Canary Wharf, the City & beyond. Part of the thriving Royal Wharf neighbourhood with its own high street, regular farmers market, primary school, gym and Riverscape residents' only Sky Lounge.

Moments from the Elizabeth Line & the DLR with direct access to
Thames Clippers from Royal Wharf Pier.



THE ELIZABETH LINE
FROM CUSTOM HOUSE

CANARY WHARF
3 MINS

LIVERPOOL STREET
10 MINS

BOND STREET
17 MINS

PADDINGTON
21 MINS

HEATHROW
44 MINS

PARK & RIVER VIEW APARTMENTS

STAMP DUTY PAID*

1 BEDS FROM
£455,000

2 BEDS FROM
£589,000

3 BEDS FROM
£690,000

020 3797 6881 • riverscape.co.uk

ballymore. *Oxley*

THAT SINKING FEELING

Strange cracks appearing around your house? *Jayne Dowle* on how to spot the tell-tale signs of subsidence — and stop it in its tracks

More UK homeowners are being told they are at increased risk of subsidence, exacerbated by extreme weather conditions such as superhot summers and frequent heavy rain.

They are finding insurance premiums rocketing, and even cover being refused, leaving uninsured homes in potential breach of their mortgage conditions.

Underwriters are clearly rattled, given that one new buildings insurance claim for subsidence was made every 15 minutes during the second half of 2022, according to the ABI (Association of British Insurers), because last summer's heatwave caused ground shrinkage.

Watching cracks appear and zigzag along walls is already a terrifying reality for thousands of British homeowners, afraid their homes might collapse beneath them.

Heavy rainfall, along with shoddy workmanship, meant a £10,000-plus bill to rectify subsidence for Mary Elliott, who discovered her buildings insurance policy contained a clause saying it did not cover the "water escape" behind subsidence causing cracks in her 1970s detached Surrey bungalow.

"We've lived here for 35 years, 30 with no cracks," says Elliott, 59, a teacher, who shares her home with her husband, Peter, 66, a retired university lecturer, and two of their four grown-up children.

"Then, around 2019, and during Covid, I started to notice cracks in two of the downstairs bedrooms, going from the top of the gable end diagonally towards the corner of the window."

In July 2022 she contacted a structural engineer, who believed the cracks indicated subsidence relating to the escape of water. Further investigations, monitoring the cracks and inspecting drains and roof, revealed that when the bungalow was built the developers failed to add a soakaway for rainwater.

Every time there was a downpour, rainwater cascaded down the roof gullies, through the downpipe and directly into the ground. The structural engineer believed this was putting pressure on the foundations, leading to subsidence.

Elliott also suspects that a dormer roof extension the family added 20 years ago not only created a roof with a higher pitch than the original — making rainwater run down faster — but it also added extra weight, putting further strain on the foundations.

The structural engineer wanted to monitor the cracks and not order remedial works until autumn and winter had passed, allowing the ground to dry out as much as possible. As a temporary measure the

Elliotts installed a water butt under each roof gully to catch rainwater, with hoses to divert it away into the sewer. "We had a very wet winter," she says. "If I didn't have the water butts draining the water away, I would have been very stressed, but at least I knew the water wasn't going in under the foundations."

Eventually a new soakaway was built 8ft deep under the lawn, and the ground dug out so the foundations could be inspected. Thankfully there was no apparent damage, but noticing those alarming cracks — now filled, followed by replastering and painting — in time could have saved the Elliotts from even more costly underpinning or other remedial measures.

Strengthening foundations by underpinning (average cost £12,500, according to the trades comparison website Checkatrade) is the traditional method of tackling subsidence. However, the Institution of Structural Engineers estimates this is now used in about 10 per cent of UK subsidence cases

More than 3 per cent of UK properties could be affected

and should be a measure of last resort. There are remedial steps, and new, less-invasive remedies, such as injecting geopolymer resin into the ground.

Increased summer temperatures are also ramping up the risk of subsidence across substantial parts of England. Using long-term temperature and rainfall pattern data from the Met Office, the British Geographical Survey (BGS) has produced a map of subsidence risk areas, based on assessing the ground's susceptibility to what it calls "shrink-swell subsidence".

This is primarily subsidence in areas of clay soil, especially susceptible to shrinkage in hot weather, explains Hossein Khansari, technical sales engineer at Mainmark, a subsidence repair company: "The type of ground that supports the foundations of a building determines the risk of subsidence, which can be seen [on the map] across the Midlands, East, and southeast of England — clay-rich soil areas."

The most "alarming find", according to Khansari, is "the significant increase in risk area in the 40 years between 2030 and 2070, highlighting a higher density of red zones where subsidence is highly likely in a lot of homeowners' lifetimes. These projections suggest that more than 3 per cent of UK properties could be affected by 2030, and one in ten homes — nearly 11 per cent — by 2070."

In the face of such elemental forces, is there anything homeowners can do to hold subsidence at bay?

As well as asking a professional tree surgeon for their opinion on potentially damaging trees in your own and neighbours' gardens — especially water-hungry species such as elm, oak, poplar and willow, which will inch their roots ever closer to foundations in search of sustenance during dry weather — avoid planting large shrubs around external walls. Never dig them out in terror; this could cause serious soil instability. Instead, prune back regularly to reduce water intake.

Also, watch for leaky drains, blocked gutters and excess water in general, says Waseem Malik, chief claims officer for Aviva UK&I General Insurance: "Leaks from drains or water mains can lead to issues as they can soften soil or even wash it away, causing the land to sink downwards."

IS IT SUBSIDENCE?

You've noticed a new crack. Should you panic?

● Benign cracks tend to be small hairline or fine cracks 2mm wide or less, says Chris Ross, director of Direct Building Products, a building materials company: "These are typically purely aesthetic and have no bearing on the structural integrity or safety of a building, brought on by things such as plaster shrinkage and traffic vibrations."

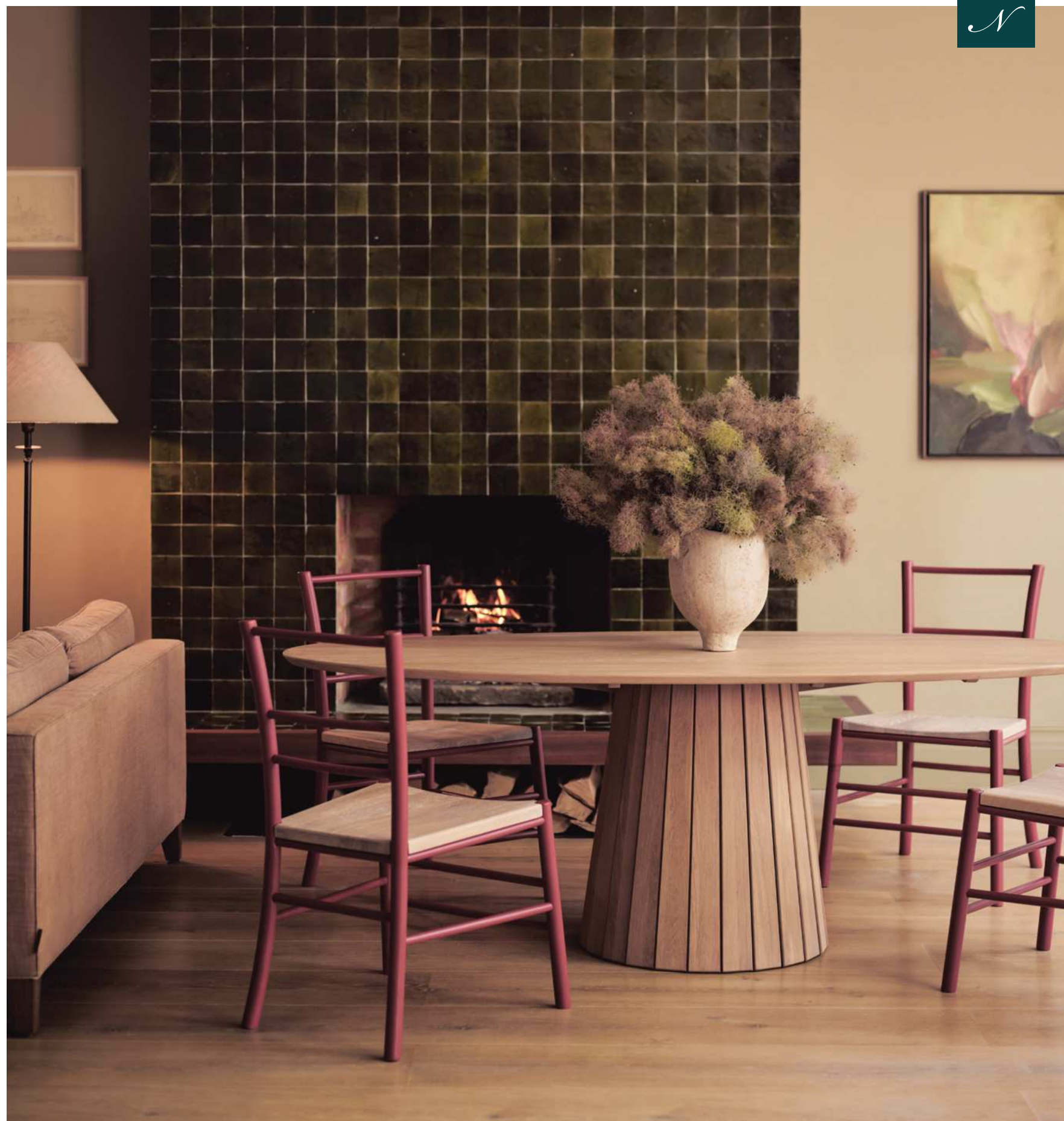
● However, if more cracks appear around a hairline crack, or cracks begin around windows, entrances or corners, these may be worrying signs of foundations weakening or shrinking, Ross notes.

● Subsidence cracks typically follow a stepped downward pattern from high to low, both vertical or diagonal. They may appear indoors and/or outdoors. A fracture bigger at the top and narrower at the bottom may indicate problems.

● Also look for: doors and windows sticking, possibly indicating your home is moving, says Jeremy Barltrop, director at the architectural ironmongery company G Johns & Sons Ltd, wallpaper peeling and bubbling — if no damp is present, the wall could be bulging — floors starting to slope, and sunken or raised areas in the garden, indicating the ground is shifting.

ILLUSTRATED BY PETE BAKER. PICTURE FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY





NEPTUNE

Thoughtful design, built to last a lifetime.

Kitchens Furniture Accessories Lighting Paint Design services
neptune.com

Home



HUGH GRAHAM
@HughGrahamST



What do you want to be when you grow up? In the old days the answer might have been astronaut, doctor, teacher or artist. Today one in five British children aged 11-16 wants a career as a social media influencer. As parents clutch their heads in despair, they can take comfort from the aspirational story of Lorna Andrews, 41, aka the influencer Lorna Luxe (@lornaluxe), who grew up in a council house in Manchester and now earns seven figures a year posting content on Instagram and TikTok. Her career has been so successful that her husband, John, 62, retired from banking last year to work with her full time. And in May they bought the Ghost House, a subterranean concrete home in Moreton Paddox, Warwickshire, that had gone on the market in 2022 for £2.25 million.

Entered by a walkway across a jet-black pool, and down a steep flight of stairs through a sunken courtyard, the Ghost House is an enigma from the outside – a cross between a modernist gallery, Japanese temple and set for a music video. Built in 2019 by Steve Smith, a nightclub owner, from designs by BPN Architects, it has been a staple for fashion shoots. Inside it's an influencer's dream, with vast Crittall-style

windows, double-height ceilings and cool concrete backdrops.

"This was the perfect place for me to live because I can only film content when it's bright," Andrews says. "We also liked how clean it was – we don't have to paint any walls. One of the reasons my business has grown is because I'm so straight-talking. This house sums us up a bit – there is no faff or fluff."

There's a lot of concrete, though: 5,000 sq ft of it on the walls, ceilings and floors, which are weathered and scuffed. ("I like the cracks. It's a work space. It should be roughed up a bit.")

It's WFH, influencer style: the couple perch around a 25ft black marble island in a cavernous open-plan kitchen/living room, John on his iMac, Andrews on her phone. An oversized custom-made mirror leans against a wall, part of her office equipment – for taking mirror selfies. To cheer up the brutalist vibe, Lorna re-covered six second-hand B&B Italia sectional sofas in pink velvet. Glass walls open onto a courtyard garden with an Insta-friendly green wall (with fake plants among the real ones) and 25-seater sofa (an outdoor kitchen is being built). "The inside-outside set-up feels like you're living in Los Angeles."

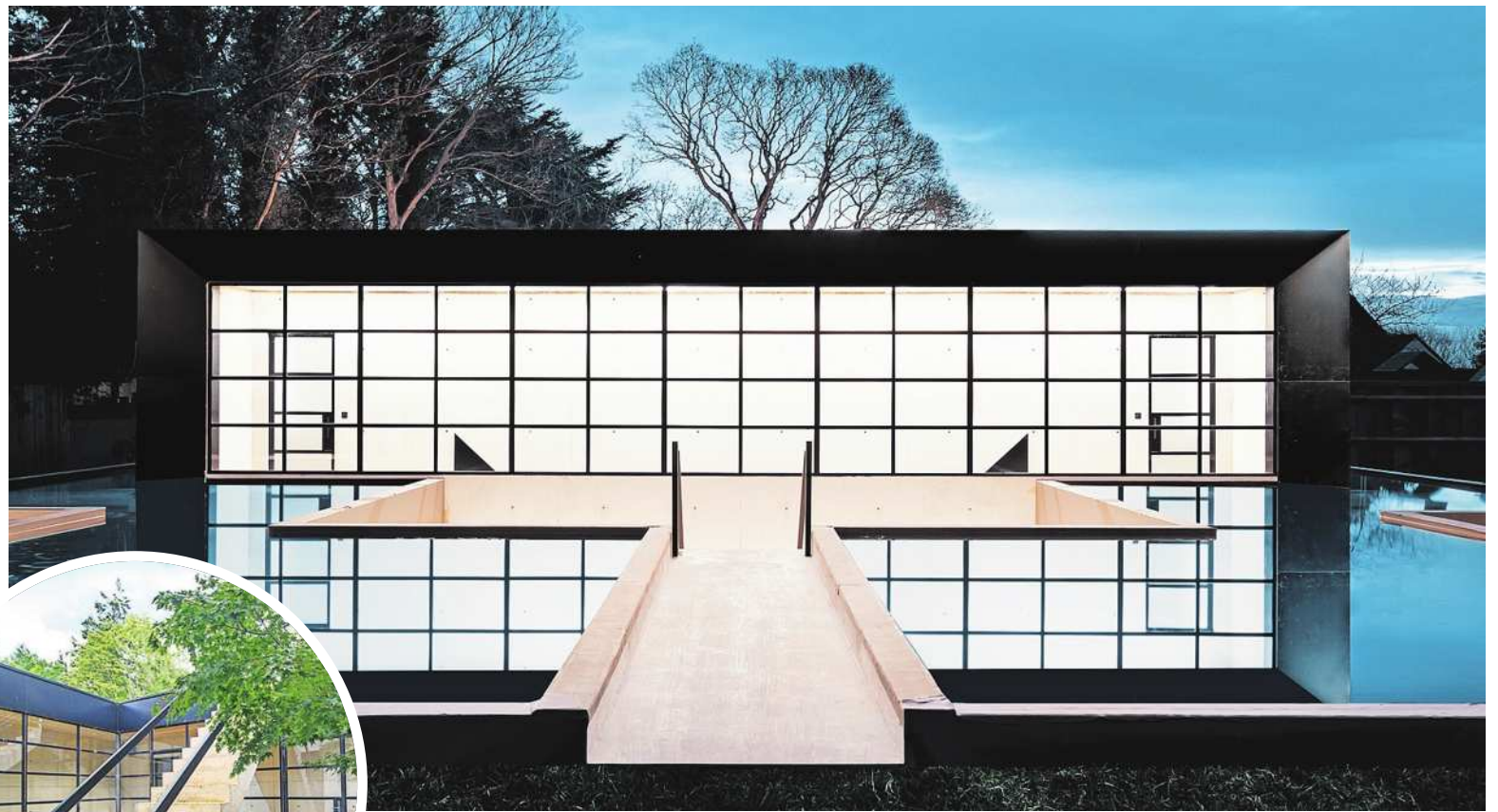
Inside are two ground-floor bedrooms (one is used as a post room for the

Influencer Lorna Luxe was looking for the perfect posing pad. She found the Ghost House, a concrete lair with its own jet-black moat

MY SPIRITUAL HOME



ADRIAN SHERRATT FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES



mountain of beauty products she is sent; unused items are given to followers or to charity). A cinema room has rows of red-velvet seats. The entire first floor is the main bedroom: all concrete, four roof lights and an en suite that only Lorna uses. ("John and I don't share bathrooms, which I think is a very good thing for a marriage. It keeps the mystery.")

Today John's day job is taking pictures and videos of his muse to post to her 1.4 million Insta followers. The couple met when Lorna was 25, during her eight-year stint as a flight attendant on Virgin Atlantic, and married soon after, living together in Hove, East Sussex, and later Horsham. Before flying she'd sold TVs and taken a student loan to attend university. When she developed anorexia at 27, she quit flying. Working in customer service at the homeware company Rockett St George, she stayed behind after work to watch its photoshoots. In 2014 she applied the tricks of the trade to her new Instagram account: posting photos of herself boosted her self-image while she was recovering from anorexia.

The couple would rise at 4.30am and John would photograph her on the streets of London in her outfit of the day before heading to work in the bank at Canary Wharf. By 2017 her Insta hobby had become a full-time career. And in 2020

Far left: Lorna (aka Lorna Luxe) and John Andrews in the landscaped garden of the Ghost House, which features six pink velvet sofas, a cinema room and a black marble island in a vast open-plan area

when lockdown hit her followers soared, and so did her income – now over seven figures gross and net. "In lockdown I couldn't go out on the street in my outfit of the day. So I thought, I'm just going to chat and do my skincare and make-up in the morning with everyone and see what they're up to, 'cause I'm bored. I got a completely new community of people that were into skincare."

Instagram's new-found emphasis on video stories rather than photographs played to her strengths: Lorna has the gift of the gab. She has partnerships with more than 20 brands, mostly skincare and beauty, which pay her to apply their products on camera and chat about them. She concedes that none of her career would have been possible without her husband. "When I met him I was an air hostess on £12,000 a year. So there was definitely an imbalance of cash, but we just share everything, and as it's tipped over the other side, it's never been an issue."

Indeed, the balance has shifted the other way. "It got to the point where John going to work every day was costing us money, because we were having to turn down jobs and he couldn't take my photos. So we made an executive decision that he would leave the bank. It took him two years. He left in December, and then he got diagnosed with cancer."

After complex surgery and gruelling bouts of chemo, John is on the mend with a new zest for life. But the couple shared their ordeal on camera. In the airbrushed world of Instagram, this warts-and-all approach has endeared her to followers: she discusses everything from her alopecia to her braces.

The daily routine of a successful influencer goes something like this: she gets up early, checks her phone, replies to messages from followers, attends Zoom meetings, sorts product, films content and edits pictures (she uses a VSCO A6 filter). For every picture she posts there might be 800 that aren't used. Her Insta grid must have perfect symmetry – a linking colour between pictures 2, 4 and 9. "In the house we have it like that too. It's 60 per cent concrete, 30 per cent black and 10 per cent pink. I do that with my wardrobe as well. I have a three-colour

palette. It keeps you from buying things that you're not going to wear."

The challenge of living your life on social media is that you never switch off. Even when she watches TV at night she's on her phone. "Replying to messages has been crucial to my growth. Creating a relationship with your community is what keeps them. Otherwise people bounce. On an average day I'll reply to about 1,000 messages, but I can go to even more."

"The other side of the coin, which nobody sees, is regularly going to London, meetings with PRs, making sure people know exactly who you are and what your value is. There's a business element to it. Because I was cabin crew with Virgin, I developed the confidence to chat to anyone. That's one of my skill sets. That has really helped with nattering to PRs."

She warns would-be influencers: "There's no such thing as a free lunch." Clients rejecting videos is another occupational hazard. But the biggest peril is the fear of losing followers. "It's a popularity contest, so you can be high one minute and irrelevant the next. That fear is what motivates me to get up every morning and do something engaging. It's another reason why I do a lot of product giveaways to my followers."

Nonetheless she's planning a back-up career. She has a staff of seven (including her mum), and this month Lorna is launching a women's clothing line, LA Space, with an emphasis on inclusive sizing, 6 to 24. The Ghost House will serve as a backdrop for shoots.

"In terms of the work I do now, I can write my own ticket, so I don't commit to things I don't enjoy. It's a lovely job. You get to talk about things you like. The only stress now is my brand launch, because it's an unknown quantity."

"The career is fragile and it could all end tomorrow. If it does, I was a very good air hostess. I could sell TVs at Currys again. Sales, customer service, that's kind of what I do now. I think there's always going to be a space for people to inform and entertain. I just don't know what that will look like in 20 years' time."

In the meantime, she's riding the social media wave.

“There’s a post room for the mountain of beauty products she is sent”

LEARNING TO ROLL

One family spent £85,000 converting a Norfolk village hall into a holiday home – and turned its skatepark into their living room. By Sharon Smith

With their planned trip to France scuppered by the Covid lockdown, Elisabeth and Aldo Ciarrocchi ended up holidaying closer to home. When restrictions were temporarily lifted in summer 2020, the couple and their daughters, Isabella, 15, and Piera, 13, took a break in Suffolk and Norfolk. They chose the counties because they were a convenient car journey from their east London home that avoided using the Blackwall Tunnel. The family then fell in love with Norfolk.

“There was something about Norfolk. It was so flat and there were these lovely swathes of forest and wide beaches,” Elisabeth says. “It felt so different.”

While there, Elisabeth and Aldo began to browse property websites for a holiday home to buy. The couple had enjoyed renovating their London home, a former factory that they rent out as a film location, and were keen to find another project.

“We were looking to see if there was something that was not extremely expensive and that needed work. A doer-upper,” Elisabeth says.

They found a former schoolhouse that had been



converted into a family home but needed a big overhaul. “It was an amazing property and we put in an offer,” she says. “But the vendor immediately took it off the market and said he didn’t want to sell it. We never knew why.”

Undaunted, the couple found another property, this time in Terrington St Clement, a village in west Norfolk near

King’s Lynn. A former Victorian village hall, it had been converted into a house that had an indoor skatepark in the large reception room.

“The owner had built it for himself for skateboarding and BMX biking. At the weekends he opened it to anyone who wanted to come in and use it and he was the DJ while they skateboarded,” she says.



The property had a living room, kitchen and bathroom situated behind the skatepark. A bedroom sat level with the top edge of the park and was reached by a short staircase. The property’s unusual design did not deter Elisabeth, 47, and Aldo, 53.

“Our reference point is different to most people’s because we’re already living in

a different type of property. We don’t live in a normal house and the factory had been a huge project anyway,” she says. “The skatepark didn’t get in my way because I could see what we could do to the layout.”

Keen not to risk missing out, Aldo viewed the property first and put in an offer of £240,000. “The owner asked that if we bought it would we keep the skatepark but Aldo said no.”

Unhappily for Piera, Elisabeth adds. “She was taking skateboarding lessons at the time so she was a bit disappointed.”

With their offer accepted, the couple did not appoint an architect because they already knew that they wanted to create a similar interior to their London home. Instead they used an architectural draughtsman to draw up the plans and advise them on what would be feasible.

“I like an industrial and practical look. I like the William Morris aesthetic of ‘have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful,’” she says.

Elisabeth is also a fan of Swedish death cleaning, a type

of minimalism that involves decluttering in later life to save your relatives the task of clearing out lots of useless items after your death.

Upon completion in March 2021, the family headed to Norfolk, intending to rip out the skatepark as their first job on the list. They were too late.

“The previous owner had brought in a load of his friends and they’d already taken it out,” she says.

So they got cracking on removing an MDF partition wall separating the former skatepark from the rear living quarters, and got a big shock when they discovered that the pitched timber roof was not insulated.

The woodburning stove in the living room was not enough to compete with the freezing air from the unheated reception room, so camping out in the property that first weekend was extremely cold, she says.

Their priority was to insulate the roof. They used the same builder as they had employed for their London house, with Aldo helping at the weekends. It took him and the builder a month to remove the timber roof, insulate it with foil, then reinstate it.

They took down the rest of the MDF interior partition



CHRIS RADBURN FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES

Homelifts
by **pollock**
Homelifts

AS SEEN
ON TV



THE LUXURY BRITISH HOME ELEVATOR

- Requires minimal space: Rails against the wall; No tripping hazard.
- Maximum safety: In car self-rescue; Fully enclosed cabin.



Homelift specialists since 1983



Call

0800 472 5002

www.pollockhomelifts.co.uk



stags.co.uk

The West Country is Stags Country



Dartmoor, Devon | 1.05 acres

A hugely impressive family home of remarkable stature, approx. 5,500sq.ft in all, including a self-contained annexe, adjacent to open moorland. EPC: D. Council Tax: G. Freehold.

Guide £1,500,000 | 01822 612458



“The glass door inserts were from a Ukrainian craftsman”

WITH IT



Left to right: the living room; the home in Terrington St Clement, Norfolk; the downstairs bathroom; the dining area; Elisabeth and Aldo Ciarrocchi and their daughters, Isabella and Piera; the skatepark that was torn down



walls and the small staircase. The former skatepark was to be their living room but, while they liked its original wood flooring, they were not keen on the walls' combination of wood panelling and white-painted brickwork. They removed the panelling and hired someone from the village to scrape off the paint. It was another long job, Elisabeth says. "The chap was young when he started doing it for us and now he's old," she jokes.

They turned the existing space behind the living room into a principal bedroom with

en suite, plus a family bathroom, utility room, kitchen and dining room. The kitchen units were reclaimed from a Savile Row tailor, sourced through Elisabeth and Aldo's family-run business Encore Reclamation.

The handmade stained-glass inserts for the doors to the principal bedroom arrived in December 2022 from a craftsman in war-torn Ukraine. "I had no idea when I first saw them that the company was in Ukraine, but when I found out I knew that I had to work with him just because of the war," she says.

The main part of the project was the addition of a mezzanine floor with two en suite bedrooms reached by a steel, semi-spiral staircase that was installed in December 2022.

"Before that Isabella and Piera had been getting to their bedrooms by a ladder. I tried it and fell off. It was all in slow-motion as I felt the ladder going slowly sideways," she says. "Luckily only my laptop and pride were hurt."

The project took two years and cost £85,000, with the family able to use the house properly for the first time at Christmas 2022.

"My aunt came over from New York and we went to the local pub for Christmas lunch, we had a great time," she says.

For Elisabeth and Aldo, a vital part of the restoration was to maintain the property's positive vibe.

"It's a happy space. A lot of our neighbours used it as kids when it was a village hall and the previous owner loved what he did to it, and that all still comes through," she says.

In homage to its former life, Elisabeth hunted down photos of people skateboarding there and has hung prints on the walls. Another bit of the past is over the front door. It is a plaque from a father in honour of his son, who died in the First World War, remembering happy times spent at the village hall.

JACKSON-STOPS



CHESHIRE
Nr Knutsford
Unparalleled country estate
£12,500,000 guide
Alderley Edge: 01625 540340



SURREY
Walton-on-Thames
Georgian style five bedroom home
£2,100,000 guide | EPC E
Weybridge: 01932 821160



WEST SUSSEX
Bolney
Arts & Crafts influenced house
£3,000,000 guide | EPC E
Mid-Sussex: 01444 484400



WORCESTERSHIRE
Honeybourne
Barn conversion with stables
£2,250,000 guide | EPC D
Chipping Campden: 01386 840224



CHESHIRE
Hale Barns
Luxurious detached property
£5,000,000 guide | EPC B
Hale: 0161 9288881



DORSET
Madjeston
Imaginatively designed house
£1,350,000 guide | EPC B
Shaftesbury: 01747 850858



SURREY
Dorking
Charming country estate
£2,950,000 guide | EPC F
Dorking: 01306 887560



SUFFOLK
Ixworth
Exceptional millhouse and watermill
£1,600,000 guide
Bury St Edmunds: 01284 700535



Recent research by Jackson-Stops shows that prices in waterside postcodes have risen by 23% in five years, with riverside homes coming out on top. Scan the code to read the full story.

NO ROOM IN FROME



The smart Somerset town has declared a housing crisis. Are the ‘blow-ins’ relocating from London really to blame, asks *Emanuele Midolo*

‘As a parent, sometimes I feel that I’m failing because I can’t provide a home for my kids,’ says Sam O’Malley, 38, who works for a charity that runs a forest school for young people in Frome, Somerset. She is now living in a flat with eight other people who share just one bathroom between them. “And a shower curtain as the bathroom door,” she adds with a smile.

A single mother of two, O’Malley grew up in Cornwall and moved to Somerset 12 years ago. “We were priced out and we randomly ended up moving to Frome. It’s been brilliant bringing up kids here. [It’s an] amazing place, with an amazing community and arts scene. But just not amazing when it comes to having a house.”

Last year O’Malley found herself homeless and could not find a property to rent. Luckily a friend came to her rescue and allowed her to stay in her house. But her situation is temporary and she says she worries about the future. “It takes a toll on your mental health,” she says.

With its narrow cobbled streets and low stone houses and cottages, Frome has

regularly appeared on the Sunday Times Best Places to Live list in recent years, praised for its architecture, independent shops and schools. But since the pandemic house prices in the town of 30,000 have skyrocketed. This, say locals, is largely due to thousands of “down-from-Londoners” (DFLs) or “blow-ins” who have arrived in the town, lured by its period properties and large gardens as they try to escape the city.

Frome finds itself at the forefront of an extraordinarily rapid transformation that has hit many other market and seaside towns in the UK, affected by the pandemic-era “race for space” exodus of thousands of people from urban centres to the countryside. Other prominent examples include Folkestone, Margate and Whitstable. One immediate benefit of the surge of inward migration is that the face of the town – previously tired and neglected in some places – has been transformed. Boarded-up shops have been replaced by artisan bakeries and trendy cafés. But the flipside, say residents, is that they are now finding they can no longer afford to live in the

FROME FACTS

- Frome’s population is 28,559, according to the 2021 national census.
- Average rentals in the town have hit £1,499 a month, according to Frome town council. On August 9 the council declared a housing crisis.
- Terraced properties made up the majority of sales in Frome during the past year, selling for an average price of £341,181. Detached properties fetched £578,481 on average.
- The average salary in Mendip, Frome’s district, is £26,666, according to the



- Office for National Statistics. The figure is lower than the UK average of £33,402.
- Average house prices were £375,015 over the past year, according to Rightmove, 10 per cent up on the previous year and 12 per cent up on the 2020 peak.
 - In comparison, properties in Bath cost £585,629 but prices were only 1 per cent up year on year.
 - According to the town’s council there are 600 people waiting for social housing, with 49 homes having become available in the past six months.

place they were brought up in and work.

Last month Frome town council took the unprecedented decision of declaring a housing crisis in the area – becoming the third in the country to do so, after South Hams in Devon and Leicester. The council is atypical, being entirely made up of 17 independent councillors under the Independents for Frome banner, and espouses a non-party-political approach.

According to the council the average cost to rent a property in Frome is now £1,499 a month. And with the Office for National Statistics putting the average salary for all workers in Mendip, Frome’s district, at £26,666 (lower than the UK average of £33,402), such prices are simply unaffordable. (However, data from Hamptons puts the average monthly rent price so far this year at £1,156.)

The councillor Polly Lamb, a former letting agent who put forward the idea for a housing crisis declaration, is diplomatic enough not to mention “DFLers”. But she says the fact the town is considered so desirable means there are bidding wars as demand increases for the relatively few rental properties left on the market. “There is simply not enough good, safe and secure housing in the rental market,” Lamb says. This is also partly a spillover from the problems with social housing – there are over 600 people on the waiting list in Frome, but only 49 homes have become available during the past six



MATT CARDY/GETTY IMAGES; NEIL JUGGINS/ALAMY

FROME

Far left: Catherine Hill, Frome. Above: the Somerset market town. Below: Sam O'Malley, who is sharing a flat with eight others

What is it really like to live in Frome? Watch our behind-the-scenes video [thetimes.co.uk](https://www.thetimes.co.uk)

months. She blames the right-to-buy scheme, which allows people to buy their own council homes and thus reduce the social housing stock. "This pushes up demand for private rentals, as there are simply not enough houses in the rental market, and pushes up prices for all."

O'Malley says that nine out of ten people that come to her charity have struggled to find a home to rent, and recounts the stories of a 24-year-old woman who lives in a van and an elderly man who was forced to live in a shed.

The house where O'Malley and her two children live is a ten-minute stroll downhill to the town centre, where "sold" and "let agreed" signs are scattered everywhere – sales and lettings conducted at prices that are a pipe dream for many residents. Catherine Hill, the "artisan quarter", has independent bakeries and coffee shops, wine and cocktail bars. A latte costs £3.50, the same price you would pay in London.

While this newly transformed town is too upmarket for many, some remember only too well what it used to be like, and tell those who complain to count their blessings. Wendy, 55, a former estate agent who does not want to give her full name ("small town, neighbours and all

that") tells me that Catherine Hill used to be "all boarded up". The town's big employers – such as Singer & Sons, a metalworks foundry that employed 700 workers, and Butler & Tanner, a printing business – had shut and the town suffered. Investment was scarce.

"It was cheaper to rent a shop on the high street and use it as storage than to have a storage unit," Wendy explains.

"Some of them became actual junk shops and vintage shops later on. It's always been quite arty, quite creative."

Wendy was lucky. She bought a three-bedroom cottage in town in 1992 for £50,000, but prices may be ten times that now. "There are not enough properties, especially the period ones.

They get snatched up quickly. I consider myself quite privileged."

She is puzzled by how popular Frome has become – blaming good marketing. "It's just a Somerset market town with a bit of glitter on the top," she says. "What I don't understand is how this thriving little town that we have now [is] so gentrified, and yet all the banks are shutting and you can never find a cab."

She has a point. I struggled to find a cab myself and when I eventually got one the taxi driver said I could only pay in cash. He pointed at a Barclays bank at the

**“
Boarded-up shops
have been replaced
by cafés and pricey
wine bars**



corner, but when I got there a notice said that it had closed. The taxi driver, Chris, pointed out another positive by-product of inward migration – crime rates have dropped. "It's changed a lot over the last ten years. It's quirky, creative and it's safe, which is funny because it used to be quite rough, quite violent," he says.

Born and bred in Frome, Chris, 41, is renting. He says he is paying £900 a month for a two-bedroom property. "I'd say there's not much difference in prices between here and Bath now."

According to Rightmove, sold house prices in Frome went up 10 per cent last year to hit an average of £375,015 – an extraordinary boom in the middle of a national slowdown. This dwarfs traditionally trendier Bath, where houses are £585,629 but only had a 1 per cent rise. Last week Zoopla, the property portal, said house prices across the UK are, on average, only 0.1 per cent higher now than they were in August 2022.

Since the council's announcement of a housing crisis, headlines have started to appear blaming "selfish second-home owners". But is that why the town has become so unaffordable? Because of a Cornwallisation of Frome? This, say experts, is not the case.

"Frome is not like Newlyn in Cornwall or Salcombe in Devon, when, every winter, there is a mass exodus and half of the properties in town are empty," says Jon Haines, director at McAllisters estate agency, who has been working in Frome for the past 25 years.

Haines says that he cannot think of a single property he sold over the past 12 months that was a second home – and that permanent London relocators dominate. "We deal almost exclusively with owner-occupiers," he explains. "These are people that are moving lock, stock and barrel into town."

Some 25 per cent of Haines's buyers are moving to Frome from London and the home counties. After Covid this flow increased, with movers wanting more outdoor and green space. "They've got young kids and the benefit with Frome is that it's got good schooling," he adds. "It's a great environment to bring up kids."

Haines believes that prices have gone up 15 per cent since the pandemic (he is not far off; they've gone up 12 per cent on the town's peak in 2020, according to Rightmove). He says that a one-bedroom flat in a modern block starts from £100,000, going up to between £225,000 and £250,000 for a two-bedroom flat. Semi-detached, modern three-bedroom houses cost between £300,000 and £325,000.

However, it is the period properties that command higher prices – and are much harder to find, despite the fact that Frome has more listed properties than any other town in Somerset. These can cost anything between £300,000 and £700,000. Haines is selling a four-bedroom Victorian house in need of refurbishment for £375,000.

In neighbouring areas, outside of Frome's popular patch, it is a completely different story. Towns like Westbury, which has a direct train connection to London Paddington and is a 15-minute drive from Frome, or Shepton Mallet are cheaper to live in, with property prices 20 or 25 per cent lower than in Frome.

When it comes to rentals, Haines argues, the main issue is the lack of availability, which is driving up prices. "Frome is a victim of its own success."

O'Malley and others like her find themselves in an odd position. They love living in Frome but don't want to be priced out. "I don't want to be forced to leave," she says. "My children were born and go to school here. I just want a home for my children."

Home



TIME AND SPACE THE WAY WE LIVE NOW
JASPER CONRAN

The designer on boarding school nightmares and naked decorators

I live in my dream home already, in Dorset. I can't imagine anywhere I'd rather be. I have hotels in Morocco so I do live there sometimes, but I'm an Englishman, you know? I love my country. I'm very lucky.

What was the first property that you purchased?

My first flat was in Primrose Hill, north London. I was 23 and about four years into my business. Putting down wooden floors was the big decision and deciding on how the kitchen was going to be. I wanted it to feel like somewhere in a sunny country, sort of Mediterranean.

What do you love about your current home?

My London flat is basically three interconnecting rooms, bedroom, kitchen and living room, which makes life very smooth. I've lived there over 20 years and I love the layout. My favourite room is my kitchen in Dorset. It's got both an Aga and a fireplace in it.

If you weren't living there, where in the world would you like to be?

I do have a fantasy of a shack on a beach. I had a holiday in India when we lived in one. It was in the mid-1980s. I was about six years into my career, and I was with lovely [magazine editor] Sally Brampton. Every morning we'd go and have a boiled egg in the café on the beach. It was one of my happiest times.



From top: Jasper Conran; his garden in Dorset; Primrose Hill, where he bought his first flat



What could you not live without?
A soft pillow. I travel with my own.

Where was the worst place you've ever lived?

Boarding school. I went to two places from the age of eight, Port Regis and Bryanston. It's not that they were terrible schools, though they weren't very comfortable in those days. It was a major shock to the system. I had a recurring nightmare until I was 45 that I was still at school. I'd [dream that I'd] go to work and do my normal working life and then I'd have to go back to school.

Who has final say on the decor at your home?

My partner [Oisin Byrne] is an artist and so he's very wrapped up in his world and he's quite happy for me to make those sorts of decisions. He lives in a parallel universe.

What is your idea of a heavenly morning at home?

I've just designed a beautiful big green velvet sofa for Next that I love, so sitting on that and looking out into the garden is my idea of heaven.

Have you lived in a haunted house?

I have. I won't say which one because there will be people living there now. When I moved in, it had a heavy atmosphere and then things started getting moved about. I had a Roberts radio and suddenly it would be blaring out at 3am in the morning. One day I sat up in bed and said, "Look, I got the message, you're here. But this house is for all of us, so please can we be getting along? If not, I'll have a queue of priests of all denominations and you can deal with them." The next morning I woke up, and all the birds were singing and the atmosphere had changed.

What music do you play loudly?

Zadok the Priest. I love blasting it out!

What is your funniest story involving a tradesman?

I once employed a pair of sweet, quite hippy people to paint the house. I think a little bit of wacky baccy might have been involved because it was a hot day, and I walked into the room and they were completely naked, covered in paint, rolling their rollers on the walls. That was quite an amusing moment.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

In the night, I wake up and I have to have a large piece of Toblerone. I don't ever eat sugar otherwise.

Interview by Katrina Burroughs

Jasper Conran's new homeware collection for Next is out now



NEXT-DOOR'S FALLING ROOF TILES COULD INJURE ME

My neighbour's roof is in a

bad state and three roof tiles have fallen into my side entrance walkway during the past three years. I brought my neighbour into my property to express my concern about the danger to myself and my family, but no action has been taken.

I suggested attaching a "tile guard" to the guttering on her roof to prevent her tiles from falling on to my property, but nothing has happened. I delivered a letter expressing my concerns and included photos of the fallen tiles in my walkway. I reminded her of the "tile guard" solution, but still no response.

I am concerned: her roof is 90 years old. The danger will only increase as more tiles loosen. I would prefer to resolve this matter amicably but can you please advise me of the legal position – how do you suggest I proceed?

JB Nicholson

I agree that litigation should be a last resort. You should continue raising the issue with your neighbour, ensuring you keep records of your correspondence/attempts to speak with her. The falling tiles may constitute a "statutory nuisance" if it is considered they are "likely" to cause injury to health. There are two ways of proceeding with an action under the Environmental Protection Act 1990:

● Report the issue to the local authority, which has a duty to investigate. If it agrees there is a nuisance, it will have to take

action to tackle it. It may serve a notice on your neighbour specifying the works required to rectify the issue. If your neighbour does not comply, the local authority can prosecute your neighbour through the magistrates' courts. The local authority may also decide to carry out the works itself and claim the cost from your neighbour.

● Alternatively, initiate proceedings in the magistrates' court. If your neighbour is convicted, a nuisance order can be made requiring them to deal with the nuisance and may include an order for compensation (for example, to cover the cost of covering your walkway). It is a criminal offence to breach a nuisance order. It may be preferable to let the local authority handle the proceedings.

Finally, you may be able to bring a claim for nuisance in the civil courts, as the continuing threat of injury is interfering with your peaceful enjoyment of your property. If successful you may obtain damages or an injunction.

The threshold for any claim above is high, and it may be considered that one tile a year is not sufficient to render a "likely" risk to health or to interfere significantly with the enjoyment of your property. It would therefore be preferable to broker a solution with your neighbour, perhaps mentioning that unless they engage you may need to involve the council. It is possible this may make them take some action.

Jo Ord & Toby Stacey, Farrer & Co LLP

Send questions to homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk. Advice given without responsibility

READERS' CLINIC

HOW CAN I KEEP MY HANGING BASKETS WATERED WHILE I AM AWAY?

I have too many baskets to take inside.

M Tylee, Derbyshire



device can also be placed in situ.

Xander

Get some medium-sized Ziploc-type plastic bags. Fill ¾ full with water. Freeze. Leave the opening ajar, and place in the baskets. Geraldine Blake, Worthing

FUTURE QUESTION

Hair keeps blocking our shower drain. Our drain has a basket with a flat top, but hairs still get in. What is the best hair catcher for such a drain?

Send tips and questions to homehelp@sunday-times.co.uk. Advice given without responsibility



PEGASUS

Joyful Later Living

Experience the joy of hassle-free later living.

Pegasus homes are designed to enhance wellness, independence and to invigorate a sense of community. With no exit fees to pay, we're simplifying life so you can savour it.

Live in a Pegasus community nationwide from £1,000_{pcm}
Exclusively for those enjoying life over sixty.

Discover a new lease of life
0207 980 8717
pegasushomes.co.uk



Terms and Conditions apply. The monthly rental price of £1,000 is available on selected apartments across some of our communities. Our tenancy agreement is issued for a minimum of a 36 month period. Please speak to our sales team for more information.

FEATURE EMPINGHAM, RUTLAND



Contemporary Stone Built Home



A fully refurbished, stylish, modern home situated in a sought after Rutland village, offering contemporary living and benefiting from outstanding country views.

The owner's favourite room

"If you step up and walk along the mezzanine, you can peer down into the reception room, with magnificent views of the Rutland countryside."

Contact: 01780 750 200

EPC: C | Council Tax: G | Tenure: Freehold
guide price £1,950,000



RADLETT HERTFORDSHIRE

A rare opportunity to purchase an exclusive, brand new 8,000 sq. ft. home, on one of Radlett's most prestigious roads.

EPC: B | Council Tax: H | Tenure: Freehold
Contact: 01923 853366 guide price £7,950,000



EAST HOATHLY EAST SUSSEX

Beautifully presented four bedroom period family home with a two bedroom annex, two one bedroom annexes, garaging and a hay barn in approx 2.5 acres.

EPC: F | Council Tax: G | Tenure: Freehold
Contact: 01825 767575 guide price £1,999,950



WESTMINSTER LONDON

Fully refurbished to a high standard in this sought after apartment building overlooking Vincent Square, with 24hr concierge.

EPC: C | Council Tax: H | Tenure: Freehold
Contact: 020 7881 1360 £1,975,000



LICHFIELD STAFFORDSHIRE

A luxury kennel business with six figure income, plus character cottage and lodge retreat with trout lake, set in grounds of approximately 4 acres with various outbuildings.

EPC: D | Council Tax: F | Tenure: Freehold
Contact: 01212 726900 offers over £1,750,000



DALSTON CUMBRIA

Arts and Crafts style property benefiting from a one bedroom annexe, triple garage and two summerhouses set in 1.25 acres of gardens with an adjoining 6.5-acre field.

EPC: E | Council Tax: G | Tenure: Freehold
Contact: 01228 583109 £1,450,000



KEMBERTON SHROPSHIRE

Welcome to the magnificent Church Barn, a truly enchanting six bedroom, five bathroom property, nestled in the picturesque village of Kemberton, near Shifnal.

EPC: F | Council Tax: G | Tenure: Freehold
Contact: 01952 780778 offers over £1,250,000



BARNSTAPLE DEVON

An immaculately presented detached home in a desirable, peaceful location with paddock, beautiful mature gardens, ample parking and garage.

EPC: C | Council Tax: E | Tenure: Freehold
Contact: 01271 347861 guide price £1,250,000



NORTH WHILBOROUGH DEVON

A wonderful home that flows extremely well and offers versatile, spacious accommodation in a sought-after hamlet, surrounded by countryside yet very convenient.

EPC Exempt | Council Tax: G | Tenure: Freehold
Contact: 01803 898321 guide price £1,200,000



IPSWICH SUFFOLK

A beautifully presented 17th Century period property, situated in the sought-after village of Henley. Set in an acre of landscaped gardens with views of the open countryside.

EPC: E | Council Tax: H | Tenure: Freehold
Contact: 01473 289700 guide price £1,200,000



BUXTED EAST SUSSEX

A beautifully presented four bedroom Grade II* Listed detached home with original period features throughout, stunning garden, garage, and outbuildings.

EPC Exempt | Council Tax: G | Tenure: Freehold
Contact: 01825 767575 OIEO £1,100,000



ASTWOOD BANK WORCESTERSHIRE

Outstanding five bedroom detached family home with incredible unspoilt countryside views and separate two bedroom annexe.

EPC: C | Council Tax: G | Tenure: Freehold
Contact: 01217 466400 guide price £975,000



WISBECH CAMBRIDGESHIRE

A fine and substantial Victorian former Vicarage. Comprising: kitchen/breakfast room, dining room, reception room, drawing room, study and six bedrooms.

EPC Exempt | Council Tax: G | Tenure: Freehold
Contact: 01553 769100 £795,000



Head Office
119-121 Park Lane, London W1 | +44 (0)20 7079 1515
parklane@fineandcountry.com

300 locations worldwide

The England rugby team's Le Touquet 5 Uzbekistan, under the skin 18 Zurich guide 33

TRAVEL
SECTION OF
THE YEAR

Travel

Me, myself and I

14 pages of the best solo tours, trips and adventures

KUONI

For the moments
you can't put into words

Exceptional holiday offers - Book by 2 October

Which? Recommended Provider

Travel

CHILD-FREE CABINS? NO, THE ADULTS ARE WORSE

CATHY ADAMS



We've had speedy boarding, charges for cabin bags and in-person check-in, but the latest airline wheeze may be the worst yet. The Dutch airline Corendon, which flies mainly between the Netherlands and high-volume Mediterranean resorts, has introduced an adults-only zone, where child-free passengers can pay to be segregated from the under-16s. For the princely sum of €45 (£38.50) one way, exclusively on flights between Amsterdam and Curacao in the Caribbean, passengers can relax knowing they won't be disturbed by children – and those with kids can rest easy knowing that only they will be the ones wanting to throttle their offspring.

An astonishing 102 seats out of 189 on Corendon's Boeing 737-800s will be "physically separated" from the rest of the aircraft by walls and curtains, which will create a "calm and relaxed flight" for child-free passengers, according to the airline.

"We strive to respond to the different needs of our customers," Atilay Uslu, the airline's founder, says. "This can have a positive effect on parents travelling with small children. They can enjoy the flight without worrying about their children making more noise."

Corendon isn't the first airline to seize upon the idea that flying with children isn't always the most pleasurable way to travel. Japan Airlines' seat-booking system displays a smiling baby face on seats to show where infants will be seated, so adults can avoid them. I don't exactly relish flying with my three-year-old (the feeling may well be mutual), and as much as I'd love the opportunity to watch one (one!) film without being constantly nagged for snacks, I think we need to get used to the idea that children... exist.

I asked Helen Thorn, one half of the comedy duo Scummy Mummies, what she thought. "It's absolutely ludicrous that airlines are offering this option," she said. "Any flight is going to be noisy, smelly and the equivalent of being sat in some sort of human minestrone, regardless of whether you're next to a family or not. I agree that a crying baby or an excited toddler can be annoying, but not as bad as ten lads on a stag do dressed as Pamela Anderson. My advice to those whingeing: get some noise-cancelling

headphones and accept you're in economy like the rest of us."

Brace position please for the hottest of hot takes: children are rarely the worst offenders on planes, and they have just as much right to be there as anyone else.

Let me explain. On a particularly awful (solo) flight from Gatwick to Las Vegas about a decade ago I was sitting next to an elderly couple who awkwardly introduced themselves upon boarding, and even more awkwardly attempted to make conversation throughout the 11-hour flight. As the plane started to descend, one of them vomited on my blanket while members of the cabin crew looked at me pityingly as if to say "Sorry about your parents" (we weren't related! I'd only just met them). This was the very same flight that was emptied of booze somewhere over Ireland, with groups of stags dressed as bananas ordering beer after beer.

Never mind crying children – I want a velvet rope to shield me from whoever has patronised Gatwick's Red Lion before boarding. Colleagues tell of being trapped behind video game-playing teenagers;

of a drunk passenger playing loud rave music from a mini speaker; of women recovering from Brazilian butt lifts blocking the aisles on a flight from Istanbul because they couldn't sit down; and of men who took their socks off and rested their bare feet on the bulkhead (why is it always men?). Vomit typically makes an appearance.

I've got a better idea: this is how I'd organise my own plane "zones". I want a VIP section that excludes pretzel masticators, people who laugh (and cry) at the in-flight entertainment and those who hog the armrests. I want to be physically separated from men who drink 17 cans of Heineken on a night flight and need to tap me on the shoulder every hour because they've broken the seal; ditto any groups of men dressed as Smurfs/Mario Kart characters/Where's Wally. Please remove those people who try to talk once I've put my headphones on. There's a separate ring of hell for seat-recliners, those who press the buzzer more than twice and those in row 28 who stand up the moment the plane lands and then pant to get off. I'm sorry to say that the apologetic saps who hand out gift bags of earplugs and sweets printed with "It's my baby's first flight" are banished too. Those are the rules and I won't hear another word about it.

If you're reading this and thinking that none of this sounds like a problem, I'm sorry to say this but: it's... you.

Who irritates you the most on flights? Let us know in the comments online or email us at travel@sunday-times.co.uk

BIG SHOT

OARSOME DISPLAY

Just when you think that Venice couldn't look any more beautiful, along comes the Regata Storica. Taking place every year on the first Sunday in September, this centuries-old occasion is one of the city's most beloved. As spectators line the route, the city's oldest and most beautiful boats, all helmed by extravagantly costumed rowers, make their way along the Grand Canal. This quintessentially Venetian show of pageantry is followed by a series of fierce and fast races, especially for Venice's traditional twin-oared gondolini



Your views

The best of this week's emails, posts and comments

COMMENT OF THE WEEK

PILOT SCHEME

In the 1950s I was one of the founder members of BOAC's Junior Jet Club ("Flight Club", last week). Flying from Baghdad to London, it got you a visit to the flight deck. The captain handed nine-year-old me the controls of a Lockheed Constellation as we flew over the crystalline white of the Alps. A few wing wobbles later, I proudly walked back to my seat, passing a few passengers who had sick bags attached to their faces.

John Smethurst, via [thetimes.co.uk](https://www.thetimes.co.uk)

GET ON BOARD

To see a cruise ship disgorge its passengers on shore and to see the surge of people this creates is to witness saturation in action ("Cruise ships aren't to blame for overtourism", last week). No matter where I have been sailing these ships dwarf their surroundings both in terms of size and numbers of people. And I have never seen a cruise ship that has turned off its engines and stopped belching diesel into the environment.

Mike Thompson, via [thetimes.co.uk](https://www.thetimes.co.uk)

I worked on cruise ships for some years and they take things like dumping rubbish at sea very seriously and all crew members receive training on this. All the captains I have worked with are aware and respectful of environmental concerns. What makes them a target I think is that you have a nice neat package of people who come ashore in the morning and are gone by evening. Much easier to limit ships coming in than, say, flights or coaches.

David Webber, via [thetimes.co.uk](https://www.thetimes.co.uk)

Cruise ships dock where I live. The local businesses welcome it as a boost to the economy. Cafés, pubs and restaurants get increased trade, plus all the excursions and taxis booked increase employment for local people. Our town does get very busy in the summer and I tend to avoid the town centre in the peak season. However, this is the price you pay for living in a nice part of the country.

Rachel Anderson, via [thetimes.co.uk](https://www.thetimes.co.uk)

FAMILY MEMORIES

I did the same as Sasha Nugara recently, reliving the happiest of times we'd had as a family ("Discovering Dad's Sri Lanka", last week). After losing my dad

T
TIMES
Travel

For expert guides to your favourite destinations, plus the latest travel news and the best trips and deals to book now, see our dedicated travel website **[the times.co.uk/travel](https://www.times.co.uk/travel)**



COVER PHOTOGRAPH: XAVIER ARNAUD/GETTY IMAGES; BIG SHOT MEDIA/COLOR SPALAMY

FORGE COFFEE, CULWORTH, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

A sleepy Northamptonshire village is not where you'd expect one of the UK's hottest coffee shops to lurk, but since Rupert Rowling took over a disused forge in Culworth that's just what he and his team have made it (forgecoffee.co.uk). You could drop in having walked part of the Millennium Way, a hundred-mile trail that runs from Pershore in Worcestershire to nearby Banbury in Oxfordshire, but plenty of locals desaddle here after a scenic bike ride in the area. Grand Fawsley Hall is a 20-minute drive away. **Details** B&B doubles from £216 (handpickedhotels.co.uk)

BEAN LOVED, SKIPTON, NORTH YORKSHIRE

Only the best baristas brew your cup of coffee at this café in the small market town of Skipton, steps from the Yorkshire Dales (beanloved.co.uk). Come for one of the team's regular beer and coffee-tasting events, or make it a stop along Skipton's high street, featuring other lovely small businesses such as Jenson Samuel for menswear and Out of the Ordinary for handcrafted jewellery, art and homeware. Broughton Sanctuary estate, with forest bathing sessions and a sauna, is just outside Skipton. **Details** Three nights' B&B cottage from £520 (broughtonsanctuary.co.uk)

FARM & FIELD CAFÉ, SOUTH PETHERTON, SOMERSET

Set in a tranquil arboretum beside a lake, Farm & Field (farmandfieldcafe.co.uk) is part of Frogmary Green Farm. It has neon signs and pink takeaway cups, plus brunch dishes from crème brûlée French toast to pulled-pork eggs benedict. Pop your head into the village's storybook church of St Peter and St Paul before walking an invigorating loop through nearby villages and cider orchards. The Hollies Hotel, a cheery guesthouse, is less than ten minutes' drive away. **Details** B&B doubles from £125 (thehollieshotel.co.uk)

HILLTOP KITCHEN, GODALMING, SURREY

This hilltop oasis in the Surrey Hills does a fabulous latte – in fact, its beans are roasted nearby, by Chimney Fire Coffee (hilltop-kitchen.co.uk). Freshly baked elevenses might include sausage rolls or sticky cinnamon buns. Half an hour's walk away is the Winkworth Arboretum,

TOP 7 COFFEE SHOPS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

“Coffee tasting boards are on hand for aficionados

a National Trust site that's great for a stroll and is home to more than a thousand species of tree and shrub. Get cosy at Barnett Hill, a country house hotel just outside Godalming.

Details B&B doubles from £179 (alexanderhotels.co.uk)

THE COFFEE APOTHECARY, UDNY, ABERDEENSHIRE

Occupying an old village post office in a quiet corner of Aberdeenshire, this coffee shop has wooden benches and pendant lights, and coffee beans from Artisan Roast in Edinburgh. Different blends appear on its blackboards each day, with coffee tasting boards on hand for aficionados (thecoffeeapothecary.co.uk). Nearby is impressive Fyvie Castle, with its Scottish baronial architecture and portrait collection, or visit the Glen Garioch whisky distillery for a tour. Drive ten minutes down the road to the Redgarth for a traditional B&B. **Details** B&B doubles from £115 (redgarth.com)

HARBOUR HEAD, PORTHLEVEN, CORNWALL

A charming harbour town surrounded by greenery, Porthleven is better known for surfers and seafood than beans. But this hip little café, the HQ of the roaster Origin Coffee, does everything from elegant latte art to huge, flaky croissants (origincoffee.co.uk). A gourmet hotspot that hosts a spring food festival, Porthleven has fabulous independent restaurants such as the fine-dining spot Kota and the Mussel Shoal seafood shack. Stay at Beacon Crag, a charming seaside guesthouse 15 minutes' walk from the harbour. **Details** B&B doubles from £110 (beaconcrag.com)

ALPINE COFFEE SHOP, BETWS-Y-COED, CONWY

In the storybook Snowdonian village of Betws-y-Coed, this quirky little spot is on the local railway station platform. Coffee comes from Heartland Coffee in Llandudno. Afternoon tea is a highlight, with traditional Welsh bara brith and homemade scones as well as your cuppa of choice. Walk to dramatic Swallow Falls, or tackle Mount Snowdon's bucket-list trails half an hour's drive away. Stay at the Royal Oak Hotel, a Victorian coaching inn, for classic style, including four-poster beds. **Details** Room-only doubles from £130 (royaloakhotel.net)

Lucy Thackray

to Alzheimer's during lockdown, I returned to the Isles of Scilly, after many years, to revisit the places where all the photos were taken of my dad looking relaxed and joyful.

Amanda Roderick, via thetimes.co.uk

HEMINGWAY HIKE

This was an enjoyable read that has memories for me ("In Hemingway's footsteps", last week). My wife and I walked the mountains in Andalusia for many years — beautiful places with mule tracks and irrigation channels built by the Moors and Romans. We'd go all day without seeing anyone or anything other than vultures and wild animals. Walk up a mountain track, reach a plateau and come across a ruined farmhouse in the middle of nowhere. The history of that part of Spain is fascinating.

John Carnegie, via thetimes.co.uk

A few years ago I walked the Camino to Santiago from Madrid. In the middle of May I left Cercedilla surprised to see what I thought was a dusting of snow on the pass. It was six inches deep at the top.

Jonathan Evans, via thetimes.co.uk

GOD'S OWN COASTLINE

It's a stunning stretch of coastline linked by the Cleveland Way ("Yorkshire Gold", last week). Whitby, of course, is an absolute gem. After a walk from the abbey along the cliffs, don't miss the Whitby Brewery. Bring binoculars

for the seabirds and a pullover and mind the gulls if carrying fish and chips.

S Johnson, via thetimes.co.uk

INTERNATIONAL INTERCITY

I took the day train on the same route last May ("The intercity that never sleeps", last week). It had a restaurant car with a decent goulash and red wine and over ten hours I had a number of interesting conversations with my Hungarian, Polish and Russian compartment mates.

Ian Richards, via thetimes.co.uk

I took a night train from Vienna to Warsaw many years ago. It was hopeless as you would be woken at every border point for passports to be checked and I barely slept a wink. With Schengen those days are long gone and it sounds like I should try to repeat the experience.

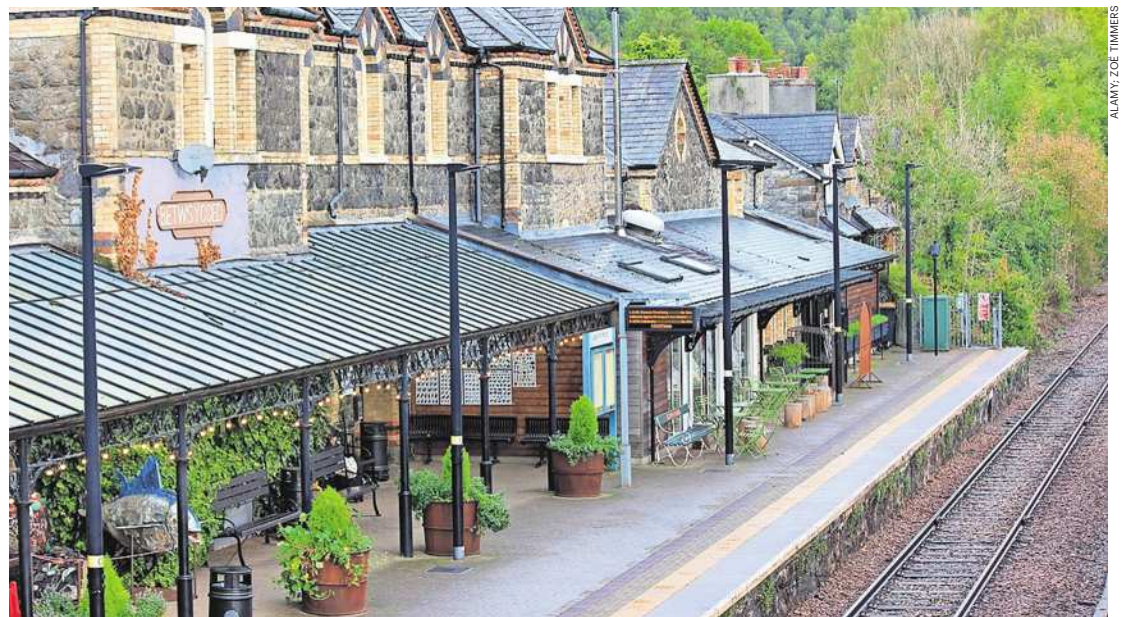
D Green, via thetimes.co.uk

BUS TRIP

I loved going from Minehead to Lynmouth on the open-top bus, although Porlock Hill was too much for it and we had to have an unscheduled stop to cool down ("UK's prettiest open-top bus routes", last week).

Sheila Green, via thetimes.co.uk

Share your experiences, opinions and tips with us by emailing travel@sunday-times.co.uk, tweeting @TimesTravel or commenting on one of our stories at thetimes.co.uk



ALAMY; ZOE TIMMERS



ALL YOUR TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS TAKEN CARE OF IN ONE PLACE



It's good to talk,
say hello to the
fastest booking
engine in travel



ATOL LICENCE: **1458**
caa.co.uk

★ Trustpilot ★★★★★
"Truly excellent: patient, friendly, helpful
& a mine of knowledge, tips and advice."

Book with confidence with
TRAILFINDERS'
Peace of Mind Policy

FIND YOUR OPEN ROAD...

Classic California Coast, USA

11 nights from **£2,199[^]**

Direct flights, 10 days fully inclusive car hire, 3★ to 4★ hotels, Alcatraz & San Francisco 2 Day Hop-On Hop-Off Bus Tour, Monterey Whale Watching tour and 2 breakfasts

- Drive south along the breathtaking Big Sur • Explore the rolling wine country of Paso Robles • Relax in the year-round sunshine in San Diego

Classic Ontario Circle, Canada

13 nights from **£1,679[#]**

Direct flights, 2 nights Toronto hotel, 11 nights motorhome hire sleeping up to 5 people, Voyage to the Falls tour, Cranberry Wine Experience, Canadian Museum of History & War tour and 1,000 Islands Helicopter Tour including Boldt Castle

- Explore Ontario's rolling hills
- Witness thundering Niagara Falls

Sydney to Canberra Loop, Australia

16 nights from **£3,149[◇]**

Flights, 14 days fully inclusive car hire, 3★ to 4★ hotels, Sydney Harbour Dinner Cruise, Sydney Opera House Tour and 9 meals

- Travel along the stunning coastline south of Sydney • Visit the UNESCO World Heritage listed Blue Mountains

Best of New Zealand

19 nights from **£4,199[◇]**

Flights, 17 days fully inclusive car hire, 3★+ to 4★+ hotels, Kaikoura Whale Watch Cruise, Doubtful Sound Day Tour, TransAlpine rail journey and Interislander ferry

- Explore the Marlborough wine region
- Discover the geothermal wonderland of Rotorua

Call to talk through your plans and order your **NEW TRAILFINDER** magazine filled with offers

FIND YOUR LUXURY MULTI CENTRE...



New York & Mexico

10 nights from **£2,149[^]**

Direct flights, 3 nights 5★ New York hotel, 7 nights 5★ **all inclusive** Riviera Maya beach resort and selected private transfers

- Admire the New York skyline • Take a stroll through Central Park • See the Statue of Liberty
- Discover the ancient Mayan ruins of Mexico
- Relax on stunning white sand beaches
- Snorkel in crystal clear waters



Singapore & Bali

13 nights from **£2,399[◇]**

Flights, 4 nights 5★ Singapore hotel, 3 nights 5★ Ubud hotel, 6 nights 5★ Nusa Dua beach resort, 9 breakfasts and private transfers

- Explore the dazzling Marina Bay waterfront in Singapore • Discover lush rice paddies & verdant jungle in Ubud • Relax on fabulous Nusa Dua beach

Saving over £1,150 per couple



Luxury Thailand Triple Centre

13 nights from **£1,999[◇]**

Flights, 3 nights 5★ Bangkok hotel, 3 nights 5★ Chiang Mai hotel, 7 nights 5★ Phuket beach resort, breakfast and private transfers

- Discover bustling Bangkok • Sample sensational local cuisine • Wander through the famous night market in Chiang Mai • Relax in paradise on the island of Phuket

Saving over £500 per couple



Romantic South Africa & Mauritius

16 nights from **£4,249[◇]**

Flights, 8 days fully inclusive car hire, 9 nights 4★+ to 5★ South Africa hotels incl breakfast, 2 nights 5★ **all inclusive** safari lodge incl 4 game drives, 5 nights 5★ Mauritius beach resort incl half board, Table Mountain Hike & City Tour, Franschhoek Wine Tram and private transfers

Saving over £450 per couple

FIND YOUR INSPIRATION...

Classic Costa Rica

14 nights from **£2,329[#]**

Flights and guided small group adventure tour incl 7 nights hotels, 6 nights lodges, 1 night homestay, experienced tour leader, selected sightseeing & 8 meals

- Go hiking in the jungle • Stay with a local family in Santa Rosa de Pocosal
- Relax in the rejuvenating hot springs of volcanic La Fortuna

Mediterranean Cruise

13 nights from **£4,999**

Direct Business Class flights, 2 nights 5★ Barcelona incl breakfast, 2 nights 5★ Lisbon incl breakfast and 9 night ultra-luxury cruise with Silversea incl butler service, fine dining & all drinks incl Champagne

- Barcelona • Casablanca • Lisbon

Saving over £1,600 per couple

Essential Vietnam & Cambodia

16 nights from **£2,249[#]**

Flights and guided small group adventure tour incl 14 nights hotels, 1 night sleeper train, 1 night junk boat, experienced tour leader, selected sightseeing & 20 meals

- Explore Halong Bay on a junk boat cruise • Discover the temples of Angkor

Saving over £200 per person

Majestic India North & South

19 nights from **£4,349[◇]**

Flights and private tour incl 18 nights hotels, 1 night houseboat, private sightseeing, 21 meals & private transfers

- Rise early for a dawn boat ride on the River Ganges, Varanasi • Witness the wonder of the Taj Mahal • Watch the world go by from your houseboat on Kerala's backwaters



CONTACT US TODAY



Scan here to find your local Travel Centre. Simply walk in, or book a Travel Centre or Virtual Appointment.

**WHEREVER AND WHENEVER...
TRUST TRAILFINDERS TO
TAKE CARE OF YOU**

TF'S TOP PICK

Great Value All Inclusive Holidays from £1,849



TOP 10 AIRFARES

BOOK WITH CONFIDENCE –

ALL FLIGHTS INCLUDE AT LEAST 20KG BAGGAGE

	Economy	Business
New York	£484 [◇]	£1,819 [#]
San Francisco	£547 [◇]	£2,705 [◇]
Miami	£554 [^]	£2,272 [#]
Nairobi	£569 [^]	£2,050 [#]
Barbados	£586 [^]	£2,335 [◇]
Singapore	£599 [^]	£2,487 [^]
Vancouver	£618 [^]	£2,430 [◇]
Cape Town	£623 [#]	£2,423 [^]
Perth	£1,094 [^]	£3,405
Auckland	£1,150 [#]	£5,002 [^]

CALL FOR ANY DESTINATION

NO ONE LOOKS AFTER YOU BETTER

Prices are per person based on twin share including flights from London or Manchester (call for details), are subject to availability & valid for selected departures in the next 6 weeks except #14 Oct - 15 Dec ^1 Jan - 31 Mar 24 ◇1 Apr - 31 Jul 24 *Prices based on 2 adults & 2 children under 12 travelling. All information correct at time of going to print on 31 Aug.

TOUCH DOWN IN LE TOUQUET



The England rugby team will love sand-yachting, cycling and golf in their World Cup base – if they get beyond the pool. By *Liz Edwards*

Le Touquet, it is fair to say, is excited about the men's Rugby World Cup, which France is hosting solo this year for the second time. For starters there's a giant rugby ball in front of the seaside resort's grand, fin-de-siècle tennis club. Fifteen feet tall, it is proving quite the photo opportunity – and not just for me and my nine-year-old son; plenty of French people rock up to say “Fromage!”.

Housed in its pedestal is a digital display counting down the days, hours, minutes and seconds until... no, not kick-off in Paris next Friday, but the arrival of the England team, who are using the town as a base during the competition. They will be training in grounds behind the tennis club, but what can they look forward to in their spare time (assuming they get any, after their defeat against Fiji in a warm-up match last weekend)? I took my son for a pre-tournament recce to find out.

An hour's drive south of Calais, Le Touquet is as wonderfully Franglais as a croissant spread with Marmite (try it – it works). Founded in 1837 by the French and developed in the early 20th century by the English, the town once popular with Wodehouse and Coward, Edward and Wallis, is made up of seaside villas and generously proportioned houses on quiet, pedalable streets through the dunes and forest. It's a bit like a Center Parc come to life, though alas the 27C indoor water park – Aqualud, down by the beach and covered by a glass pyramid rather than a dome – is no longer open.

Le Touquet is family-friendly, genteel – all hydrangeas and hollyhocks – and possibly not the first place you'd picture Manu Tuilagi, the England centre, who

was ticked off by Auckland police during the 2011 World Cup for jumping off a ferry after a day out with his team-mates. (Nor the players who were photographed at a “dwarf-throwing” evening in Queenstown the same year.)

When England play in France in the annual Six Nations tournament, they stay at the upmarket Hotel Molitor in Paris. Base camp for the Japan World Cup in 2019, when England were third favourite to win, was the swanky Sheraton Grande Ocean Resort in south-coast Miyazaki. But this year, with the odds considerably longer, the head coach Steve Borthwick and his boys will check in to the Holiday Inn.

So we do too. It scores as highly on TripAdvisor as the Sheraton (a solid four), even without a spa or space for more than two people in the fitness room, and it's a perfectly nice place for a short break. Built in the 1990s, it's certainly not cutting edge – glass-roofed reception atrium with random merchandise in display cabinets; hairdryers attached to bathroom walls; beaucoup de beige. It's the sort of endearingly naff stuff that says “Relax! No pretensions here”. Perhaps the leaflet racks, pop-up banner stands, shoe-polishing machine and lonely under-stairs computer will put the team at ease too.

What I can guarantee they will love is the breakfast spread, which is so fill-your-boots you can have two types of pancake. Some may appreciate the arty boobs adorning the walls of the bar. They will no doubt be thrilled to see that Dove, England's Official Male Grooming Partner, supplies the toiletries (also fixed to bathroom walls).

The team and their entourage will occupy about 60 of the hotel's 88

bedrooms. Borthwick has bagsied one of two suites, which is more modern than other rooms, with wooden floors and an arc lamp by the glass desk, although the palette is a bit *Allez les Bleus*. I hope someone has primed the team not to expect a 50m art deco *piscine* like the Molitor's in Paris, where the bikini was born and Johnny “Tarzan” Weissmuller was a lifeguard. The Holiday Inn's (indoor-only) swimming pool isn't bad, but the temperature is less “kick back in the tropics”, more “post-match ice bath”.

Jean Michel Thibaut, the hotel's general manager, will have on his hands the biggest security operation of his 30 years here, even though the Ireland men's football team have been guests, as have Paris St-Germain (my son can't get over the idea we might have the same room Lionel Messi stayed in). But there will still be other guests in the hotel and, Thibaut says, shrugging, you can't stop kids asking for autographs. “I don't want to barricade the players in. That will create its own



The beach at Le Touquet, main. Sand-yachting, and Liz with the countdown display, above. The hotel pool, below



stress,” he says. Does he think they'll explore the town? He smiles. “It's the World Cup, not a prison.”

The first thing they should do is hire some bikes. Le Touquet is no sprawling metropolis, but the hotel is a 20-minute walk to the beach and, besides, the joy of spinning through forest and along seafront will only calm any pre-Argentina-match jitters. Among the town's delis, patisseries and wine shops is the Baleine Royale, which loans sit-up-and-beg bikes from £14 a day (labaleineroyale.com).

The boys should also consider a cycle tour, such as the one we do with Alice Oniszczyk from the tourist office, taking in the casino that inspired Ian Fleming's *Casino Royale*, the neogothic town hall where Emmanuel Macron married Brigitte (they still spend time here) and Serge Gainsbourg Park – he worked in the piano bar that's now called Flavio (from £13pp; letouquet.com). The team's visit is such a big deal, Oniszczyk says, that the tourist office boss has had the entire staff role-playing in English to practise. (The phrase “Jolly bad luck” may come in handy.) Owen Farrell is among the many rugby players who love a bit of golf – and lucky for them it's a mainstay in Le Touquet. Even the town's logo is a caddy, cropping up everywhere from restaurant napkins to roundabout sculptures.

If schedules are tight, however, I can instead recommend the mini golf by the beach, not least because – kill two birds with one golf ball – the obstacles represent Le Touquet's sightseeing highlights. The Westminster hotel with its sloping ramp proves our hole-in-21 undoing (from £8; minigolftouquet.wixsite.com).

Do we think the team will be in the market for a drink? Oniszczyk suggests they might try Rue de Metz, where Le Globe Trotter is decorated with football scarves and big-game ticket stubs. Or L'Impasse, which has lots of screens, pool tables, arcade games and, we notice in passing, bouncers on friendly terms with the local cops. (They won't stand any nonsense; they even move my son along when he stops his bike in the wrong place. He thinks it's because he's wearing his England shirt.)

For real thrills, though, the squad need to give sand-yachting a go (from £38pp; letouquet.com). Like dinghy sailing but on three wheels, it takes full advantage of the empty expanse of the four-mile-long, broad, blustery beach. With dry suits on, and minimal instruction imparted, we're off, razor shells crunching under wheels as we zip along. Nothing so exhilarating has the right to be so simple – it's an easy win. Just what the team doctor ordered.

Liz Edwards was a guest of Hauts-de-France Tourism (hautsdefrancetourism.com); Le Touquet Paris-Plage (letouquet.com); Holiday Inn, which has room-only doubles from £134 (ihg.com); and Irish Ferries, which has Dover-Calais returns for a car and up to nine passengers from £98 (irishferries.com)

Travel SOLO ADVENTURE SPECIAL

Going it alone is on the up. There’s a travel firm to match, whatever your style, says *Emma Thomson*

FLASH PACK

Best for posh backpacking
The married couple Radha Vyas and Lee Thompson founded Flash Pack in 2014 after seeing a gap in the market between off-the-rack tours for single 20-year-olds and those for people aged 50-plus – they designed adventures with a touch of luxury for travellers in their thirties and forties. Trips are classic itineraries interspersed with “can’t do it by yourself” experiences such as learning to make pasteis de nata in Lisbon and canyoning through hidden caves in Slovenia. And with 80 per cent of “Flashpackers” keeping in touch after a holiday, they’re great for making lasting friends. An island-hopping trip around Greece, starting in Athens and visiting Naxos and Santorini, mixes plenty of beach time with cooking classes and thermal springs. **Details** Eight nights’ B&B from £2,725pp, including activities and some extra meals (flashpack.com). Fly to Athens

G ADVENTURES

Best for local culture
G Adventures connects travellers with local people in the countries they visit and is the world’s largest small-group adventure travel company. Tours are hosted in more than 100 countries and run the gamut from 18-30 trips to local-living tours that base travellers with a host family. Most of the trips do not have a single supplement, and accommodation is based on a twin-share basis with another traveller of the same sex. What sets G Adventures apart is its focus on putting money back into local communities and supporting indigenous peoples, women and youth through its non-profit partner, Planeterra Foundation. The Lima to La Paz tour includes a trip to a women’s weaving co-operative in Ccaccacollo as well as the Inca Trail, Lake Titicaca and the white city of Arequipa. **Details** Twenty nights’ B&B from £1,702pp, including activities and some extra meals (gadventures.com). Fly to Lima

EXPLORE!

Best for adventure
Explore! is an adventure travel company with tours in all seven continents spanning everything from cycling the Amalfi coast to jungle hikes in Jamaica. Roughly half its customers travel solo, alongside a mix of couples or friends travelling together. The average group size is 12, and trips are graded from “relaxed”, with more free time, to “full on”. While solos can join all tours, Explore! also provides exclusively solo traveller tours that are broken down into categories for those in their thirties, forties, fifties and sixties, as well as self-guided walking and cycling holidays, including the Jordan Discovery tour, which is designed for the over-50s and takes in Petra, Wadi Rum, the Dead Sea and the Roman remains of Jerash. **Details** Eight nights’ B&B from £1,060pp, including activities and some extra meals (explore.co.uk). Fly to Amman



GABRIEL MELLO, JULIAN KAESLER/GETTY IMAGES

LONE OPERATORS

ABU DHABI
from only £575^{**}pp

5★ Beach Rotana Abu Dhabi • Save up to 30% • FREE Room Upgrade* • Kids Stay & Eat for FREE~	3nts BB from £575^{**} pp
5★ The Ritz-Carlton Abu Dhabi, Grand Canal • Save up to 36% • Kids Stay & Eat for FREE~	3nts BB from £679^{*Δ} pp
5★ W Abu Dhabi - Yas Island • Save up to 25% • FREE Half Board • Kids Stay & Eat for FREE~ • FREE Access to Yas Beach Club*	3nts HB from £689^{*Δ} pp
5★ The WB Abu Dhabi, Curio Collection by Hilton • Save up to 15% • Kids Stay & Eat for FREE~ • FREE Access to Yas Theme Park*	3nts BB from £729^{*Δ} pp
5★ Rixos Premium Saadiyat Island • Save up to 40% • Kids Stay & Eat for FREE~	3nts UAI from £855^{*Δ} pp
5★ Jumeirah at Saadiyat Island Resort • Save up to 35% • FREE Half Board • Kids Stay & Eat for FREE~	4nts HB from £869^{*Δ} pp
5★ Emirates Palace Mandarin Oriental • Save up to 20% • FREE Half Board	3nts HB from £895^{*Δ} pp
5★ The St. Regis Saadiyat Island Resort, Abu Dhabi • Discounted Rates	5nts BB from £959^{**} pp

INDIA TOUR
Tiger and Taj
• Delhi • Jaipur • Ranthambore • Agra
10 days / 8 nights BB/FB from **£1,549^{**}**pp

FAR EAST
4★ Khao Lak Emerald Beach Resort & Spa, Thailand **EXCLUSIVE**
7nts BB from **£729^{*#}**pp
• FREE Room Upgrade*

5★ Pelangi Beach Resort & Spa, Langkawi, Malaysia
7nts BB from **£1,235^{*Δ}**pp
• Stay 7, Pay 5 Nights

5★ Grand Mirage **EXCLUSIVE**
Resort & Thalasso Bali, Indonesia
7nts AI from **£1,425^{*#}**pp
• Stay 7, Pay 6 Nights • FREE Room Upgrade*

USA, MEXICO & CARIBBEAN
4★ The Lexington Hotel, Autograph Collection, New York, USA
3nts RO from **£825^{*†}**pp
• Discounted Prices

5★ Playacar Palace, Riviera Maya, Mexico
7nts AI from **£1,395^{*Δ}**pp
• Discounted Prices

5★ Calabash Luxury Boutique Hotel, Grenada, Caribbean
7nts BB from **£2,069^{*Δ}**pp
• Unlimited Non-motorised Water-Sports*

TURKEY & TANZANIA
5★ Rixos Downtown Antalya, Turkey
5nts AI from **£605^{*Δ}**pp
• Save up to 15%

5★ Emerald Zanzibar Resort & Spa, Tanzania
7nts DAI from **£1,229^{*†}**pp
• Save up to 15% • Kids Stay & Eat for FREE~

MALDIVES
from only £2,189^{*#}pp

5★ Atmosphere Kanifushi • Save up to 35% • FREE Return Transfer*	7nts AI from £2,189^{*#} pp
5★ LUX* South Ari Atoll Resort & Villas • Save up to 40% • FREE All Inclusive	7nts AI from £2,539^{*Δ} pp
5★ Sun Siyam Iru Fushi EXCLUSIVE • Save up to 25% • FREE Room Upgrade* • FREE Return Transfer*	7nts AI from £2,569^{*#} pp

INDIAN OCEAN
from only £1,065^{*Δ}pp

5★ Anantara Kalutara Resort, Sri Lanka • Save up to 40% • FREE Half Board	7nts HB from £1,065^{*Δ} pp
5★ Shangri-La Le Touessrok Mauritius SPECIAL OFFER • Save up to 35%	7nts BB from £1,809^{*Δ} pp
5★ Constance Ephelia Mahe Seychelles • Save up to 25%	7nts HB from £1,825^{*†} pp

ONE TRAVELLER**Best for mature travellers**

One Traveller is a family-run company that hosts holidays exclusively for mature single travellers, ranging in age from 50 to fit 80-year-olds. Group sizes are larger (on average about 25), and the company provides strong European and Asian offerings, as well as a handful of destinations further afield, such as Japan, Chile and Morocco, plus ocean cruises and UK holidays. “Scenic” and “relaxed” tours cater to those with lower fitness levels, and most tours include Vox audio guides for those with a hearing impairment. Its South Africa and Victoria Falls trip includes game drives and visits to the Stellenbosch wine region and Cape Town.

Details Sixteen nights’ B&B from £7,650pp, including flights, activities and most other meals (onetraveller.co.uk)

SOLOS HOLIDAYS**Best for private rooms**

What started as golfing holidays for players whose partners didn’t want to join them has grown into tours for solo travellers on six continents. Holidays are organised by activity: from golf, tennis and treks to city breaks and cultural

“discovery” tours. Aimed mainly at travellers aged 40 and above, they range from two nights to two weeks in length. Unlike many operators, Solos ensures that travellers have exclusive use of a single or double/twin room with no single supplement. Ski trips are popular, including to Les Diablerets in Switzerland, available over Christmas.

Details Seven nights’ half-board from £1,615pp, including flights and transfers (solosolidays.co.uk)

CONTIKI**Best for 18-35s**

In the summer of 1962 the New Zealander John Anderson began to organise tours of Europe out of his minivan and Contiki was born. The backpacking spirit is still alive and strong, with the company catering exclusively to 18 to 35-year-olds and visiting a list of destinations that spans six continents. Some 70 per cent of their travellers join trips solo, and there’s a strong emphasis on “social travel” – group sizes can range from 12 to 52 people – to help people to forge lasting friendships. As a bonus, trips can be paid for in instalments and cancelled free of charge. And in destinations where travelling

by train is unwieldy, such as the Boot, Scoot’n’Blues tour of New Orleans, Nashville, Memphis and Austin, Contiki’s coach travel is a bonus.

Details Fourteen nights’ B&B from £2,792pp, including some extra meals (contiki.com). Fly to Dallas

EXODUS**Best for travellers short on time**

When the 1970s hippie trail across Asia was in its heyday, John Gillies and David Burlinson drove an overland truck into the Hindu Kush. Word spread, and they built three more trucks to take groups from London to Kathmandu. That spirit of adventure still informs Exodus trips, and solo travellers are eligible to join, with the most popular destinations for singles including Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Costa Rica. It provides Exodus Edits – bite-size, adventure-packed trips for people in their thirties and forties that are designed to eat into annual leave as little as possible and allow travellers to

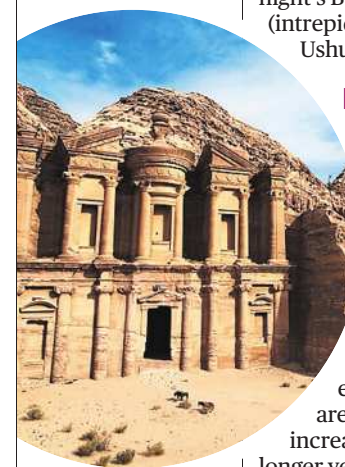
take multiple shorter trips in a year, such as a group holiday to Cuba that visits Havana, the Viñales Valley, Cienfuegos and Trinidad in a week.

Details Seven nights’ B&B from £1,195pp, including some extra meals and activities (exodus.co.uk). Fly to Havana

INTREPID**Best for sustainability**

Carbon neutral since 2010, an early adopter of carbon offsets and with its own not-for-profit foundation, Intrepid was started in 1989 by two Australian friends, Darrell Wade and Geoff Manchester. Thirty years on and 50 per cent of its customers are single travellers, and it lives up to its name by heading to particularly far-flung areas of the globe, including Samoa, Papua New Guinea and the tiny African country of Djibouti. Intrepid ventures into the Polar regions too, including voyages on the ice-strengthened Ocean Endeavour, which takes 200 passengers.

Details Nine nights’ full board from £5,740pp, plus one



Petra in Jordan and, left, Cascais, near Lisbon

night’s B&B in a hotel (intrepidtravel.com). Fly to Ushuaia

RABBIE’S**Best for the UK**

Although Rabbie’s has now started trips within Europe, Robin Worsnopp began his company in Scotland in 1993 with a single Sherpa van. Some tours – especially in the UK – are day trips, but increasingly there are also

longer versions. Most prices in the UK don’t include accommodation (although Rabbie’s can book hotels for their guests) but do welcome children, while European overnight tours include hotels. What’s universal is Rabbie’s fleet of driver-guides and 16-seater minibuses that can head into offbeat and single-track territory with ease. The London to Edinburgh Adventure winds its way through Stratford-upon-Avon, Snowdonia, Whitby, the Lake District and the borderlands of Cumbria and Scotland.

Details Eight days, transport-only, from £741 (rabbies.com)
Additional reporting by Sarah Turner

“
The backpacking spirit is still alive and strong”



just you
solo adventures together

Discover **THE WORLD**



FIND OUT MORE



Uzbekistan & The Silk Road
11 days from £3249

HOLIDAY INCLUDES

- Return flights • 9 nights in 3 & 4-star hotels • A room of your own guaranteed • 19 included meals & so much more



Experience South Africa
14 days from £4449

HOLIDAY INCLUDES

- Return flights • 11 nights in 3 & 4-star hotels • A room of your own guaranteed • 18 included meals & so much more



Discover Vietnam
13 days from £3599

HOLIDAY INCLUDES

- Return flights • 9 nights in 4-star hotels • A room of your own guaranteed • 21 included meals & so much more

OVER 20
YEARS OF
EXPERTISE



Visit **justyou.co.uk** for full itineraries, call **0800 987 5181**
or contact your local travel agent to book

*Terms and conditions apply visit justyou.co.uk/essential-information for details.



Travel SOLO ADVENTURE SPECIAL

Central Romania has wonderful food, fascinating history and – supposedly – Dracula’s castle. And a new airport makes it easier than ever to visit, says *Felicity Cloake*

I am very sorry to tell you,” my guide Claudia Falutoiu says in the gentle tone of someone delivering bad news, as she executes an audacious parking manoeuvre outside the Banca Transilvania in the Romanian village of Bran, “that vampires do not exist.” By the look of the crowds streaming towards Bran Castle, aka “Dracula’s spooky castle”, this revelation is something of a well-kept local secret. Although the medieval fortress has no

proven connection to Bram Stoker’s story, nor to its alleged inspiration, Vlad the Impaler, it welcomed 720,000 visitors last year, making it one of the country’s top tourist attractions. A new airport in the nearby city of Brasov is hoping to capitalise on the popularity of the bloodthirsty count; Wizz Air launched a thrice-weekly service to “the gateway to Transylvania” from Luton last month, cutting the transit time from baggage reclaim to just

30 minutes – whereas it’s a three-hour drive from Bucharest. It’s just a shame the queue to get into the castle is . . . three hours long. Falutoiu, a Bucharest native who fell in love with the region a decade ago and never went home, rolls her eyes and suggests lunch instead – we’ll come back tomorrow morning, she promises, early. (She doesn’t explicitly say “and get it over with”, but I have the distinct feeling she’s not a big Dracula fan – the next evening, in the magnificent walled town of Sighisoara, she points out a restaurant claiming to be his birthplace, adding wryly: “Very strange, because this house is from the 16th century, and Vlad was born in 1431.”)

It’s hard to think of a better person to show me around on my three-day tour of Transylvania. Driving the picturesque triangle – from our first stop, Brasov, to Sighisoara, 70 miles north, and then 85 miles east to Sibiu, nicknamed “the town with eyes” for its distinctive sleepy dormer windows – we cover a lot of ground on Romanian history, culture and food. I’m delighted to discover Falutoiu is as much of an enthusiast as I am.

Away from the delights of the Bran Souvenir Village (embroidered peasant blouses and Pokémon plushies), Transylvania proves satisfyingly true to the romantic vision I’ve been harbouring since first reading about a place that “didn’t just look like a fairytale” but “tasted like one too” in a 2012 *Saveur* article by Alexander Lobrano. Densely forested peaks tower above meadows thick with flowers, and this is great walking country for anyone keen to experience Europe at its wildest – the mountains are home to the Continent’s largest population of brown bears. But the occasional flash of scythe on hay at the side of the road and the shepherds tending their fat-tailed flocks on the upper slopes ensure that, this morning at least, there’s little resemblance to the dark and lonely landscape of Stoker’s imagination.

In the brightly painted villages, gardens overflow with produce, corn pressed up against iron railings, apple trees heavy with rosy fruit and, barely visible through shuttered gates, shady canopies of vines. The houses all turn defensively inwards from the road, with its ragbag traffic of shiny German estate cars and families crammed on to carts pulled by horses streaming red ribbons against the evil eye. Not a coincidence, Falutoiu explains, dolloping sour cream into her soup. We’re just outside the city,



on the wooden terrace of the Stana Turistica, an idyllic restaurant serving up recipes “from old sheepfolds or found by shepherds in their wanderings” to the chichi clientele of the ski resort of Poiana Brasov. Transylvania’s

position at the mouth of the Buzau Pass, the easiest route across the Carpathian Mountains from the south, she explains, has long encouraged a rather unwelcoming style of architecture.

In fact, this is said to be the most heavily fortified region in Europe, a place of walled cities, concealed courtyards and fortress churches, and little wonder: the village of Prejmer was attacked more than 50 times by Tatar and Turkish forces between the 13th and 17th centuries. Even so, its impressive church, surrounded by a 14m-high protective ring complete with five towers and a moat, stands tall to this day.

There were pros as well as cons about the location: yes, you might find yourself under siege on a semi-regular basis but, equally, being on the main road to Vienna brought great

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT HARDING. IURII BURIAK/ALAMY, ALEXANDER SPATARU/GETTY IMAGES

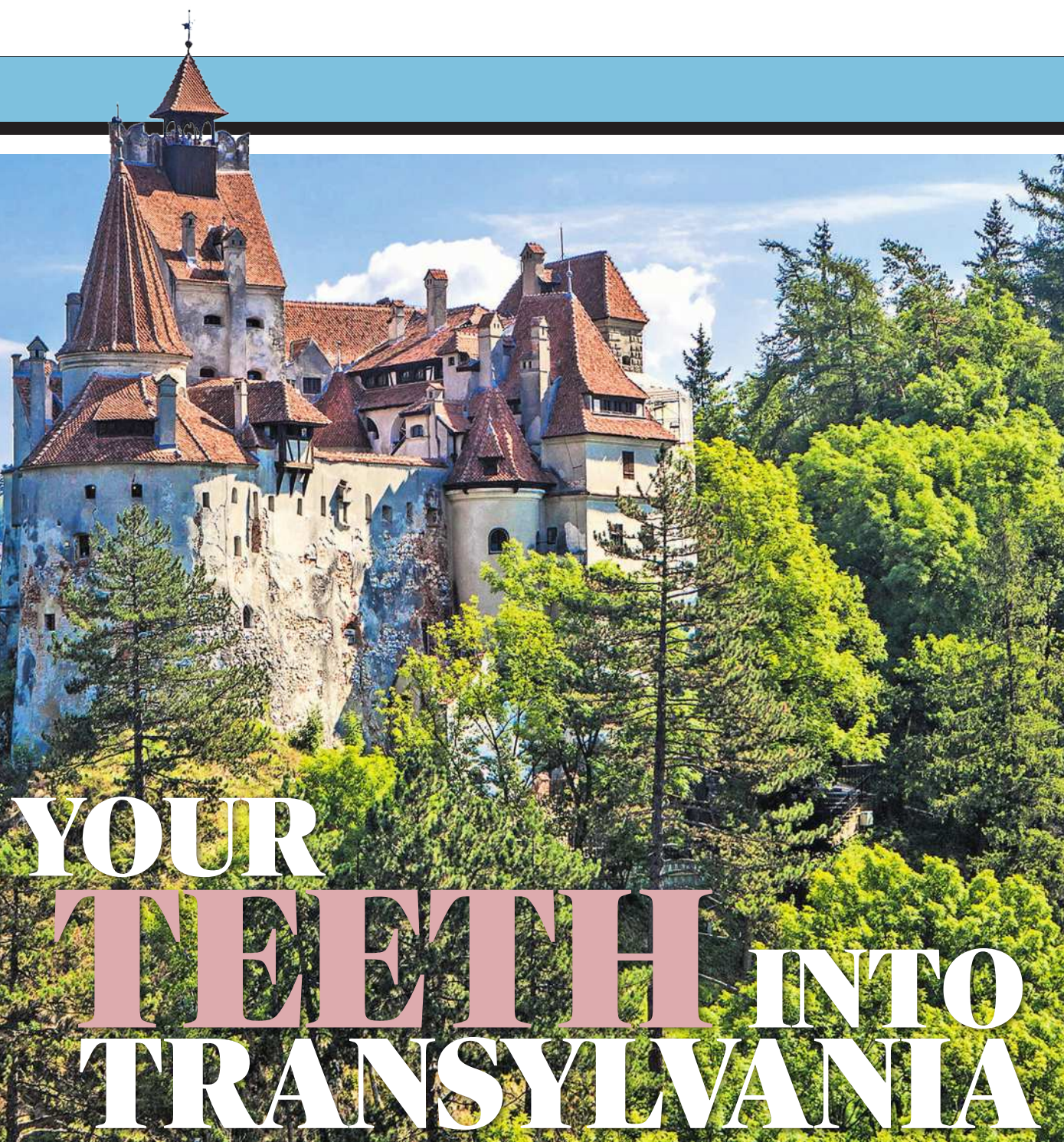
For the moments you can't put into words

South Africa - 7 nights
The Winchester, Cape Town
4 nights | Room & Breakfast | Loft Room
Le Franschhoek Hotel & Spa, The Winelands
3 nights | Room & Breakfast | Classic Room
Includes scenic helicopter flight, Cape Town walking tour and two wine experiences
Prices from £2750pp
Save up to £350 per couple
Selected dates in January, February & March 2024
Flights based on Emirates from Heathrow

www.alfredand.co.uk
or call us on 0808 239 8368

Alfred&
by KUONI

Offer terms & conditions* Unless otherwise stated, all offers are based on guide prices per person for two adults sharing a room including transfers and economy flights from the stated airport and must be booked by 2nd October 2023. Prices are accurate as of 25th August 2023 but are subject to availability and may change or be withdrawn without notice, call 0808 239 8368 or visit www.alfredand.co.uk to find the latest prices. Sale prices can change both up and down and these prices represent only a guide. The quoted savings or value-added offers are valid for the date or dates stated in the offer and may vary dependent on the departure date or range of dates for which you require travel and may have been promoted previously. Where a percentage save exists, this is a saving on the hotel rates only, unless otherwise stated. Savings shown are comparisons against holidays sold through Alfred& by Kuoni in August 2023. For full booking terms and conditions, please visit our website www.alfredand.co.uk/terms-conditions



YOUR TEETH INTO TRANSYLVANIA

wealth. As we follow the same route to the handsome city of Brasov – one of the Siebenburgen, or seven citadels, built by the Saxon community that lived in the area for more than 800 years – I try to imagine the caravans of silks and spices with whose money it was built. An unexpected collection of Anatolian prayer mats in Brasov's so-called Black Church, the largest gothic edifice in southeastern Europe, offers a neat illustration of Transylvania's position on the edge of both the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires.

Wandering Brasov's cobbled streets in the late afternoon, I'm impressed by

the colourful baroque buildings; an early morning walk up to the White Tower, built in 1494, shows me what lies behind those elegant façades. From my lofty perch I can see a fascinating jumble of medieval masonry – structures so ancient they seem to rise almost organically from the ground, edges smoothed by the passage of time, crowded together under vast, erratically tiled roofs. I spot a man come out onto a wonky balcony and stretch luxuriantly, a lone dog cross the Piata Sfatului, the square that in the 17th century was reportedly the last place in Europe to hold a public witch burning, and a woman pegging out some washing in

a yard with a toddler clutching at her ankles. It's like a Where's Wally tableau vivant, and I find it hard to tear myself away – although I'll be honest, the berry cheesecake at breakfast softens the blow.

Indeed, the only warning I'd issue about Romanian food is that portion sizes tend to be absurdly generous, so you'll need to make a conscious effort to leave room for the famous papanasi, a fresh cheese pastry covered in sour cherry or berry conserve and the ubiquitous sour cream. Though the Brasov restaurants we visit are all excellent, I have my best meal somewhere else entirely. When the Saxon population fled west in 1989, their fortified

Lutheran churches lost their congregations. Many of them are now looked after by Romanians such as Falutoiu, who is a custodian of the one in the village of Apold, just south of Sighisoara. On my final afternoon in Transylvania, after sampling some homemade plum brandy with a Roma family of coppersmiths, I take a breadmaking class she has arranged there with Marius, a local chef. Not only do we produce two fine loaves, wrapped in cabbage leaves to protect them from the heat of the 15th-century wood-fired oven, but he also knocks up some cricket balls of baked polenta stuffed with sheep's cheese, followed by

pumpkin soup and the best tomatoes I've ever tasted, picked from his garden and served with local cured meats and cheeses.

Afterwards Falutoiu takes me into the church to show off the 14th-century wall paintings, urges me to pick some plums from the delicious jungle outside and leaves me to climb the squat tower while she helps with the washing-up. The panorama from the top is mesmerising: rolling sunlit hills, dark forest and, closer to hand, a farming community on a sleepy summer Sunday. A dog barks, a couple of teenage girls shriek, but there's nothing else to break the heavy silence. Ignore the few dusty parked cars and the view feels timeless.

Such peace is in shorter supply an hour's drive down the road in Viscri, the Unesco world heritage site popularly known as the "Prince Charles village", in which our now monarch owns an 18th-century property that has become a visitor centre and guesthouse. Nonresident cars are banned and cows and geese graze on the grass verges – but after a few days in Transylvania it feels like a fairly standard village overwhelmed by an unusual number of tourists: why battle the crowds in a living museum

when the whole region is so gloriously unspoilt?

As we sip homemade elderflower cordial in a farm café on the main (only) street, Charles beadily regarding us from a photo on the counter, Falutoiu is in thoughtful mood. "We are lucky we have such a rich heritage. A hundred years ago this would have been nothing special, but because of communism it has been frozen in time," she muses. "Now we just have to work out how to preserve it."

It's this combination of history and natural beauty that Charles fell for on his first visit to Transylvania 25 years ago, and that has now beguiled me too. Even Bran Castle charms, when we eventually make it in before the tour groups – principally thanks to its time as the home of Romania's beloved Queen Maria, the Kent-born granddaughter of Queen Victoria. It does boast an astonishingly comprehensive collection of instruments of torture, but the vampires are largely confined to the gift shop. I can't say I'm very disappointed.

Felicity Cloake was a guest of Regent, which has five nights' B&B from £1,275pp, including flights, transfers and activities (regent-holidays.co.uk)



Bran Castle, left. Piata Sfatului in Brasov, above. Papanasi, a cheese pastry and cream dessert, below. The ski resort at Poiana Brasov, bottom





★ ★ ★ ★ ★
DUBAI
Beachside Extravagance



Experience signature W opulence at this luxe oasis, with a medley of pools, celebrity chef restaurants and an unrivalled Palm Jumeirah location.

Your *handpicked* inclusions:

- **Three nights in an upgraded, expansive Fabulous Room** with a private balcony boasting uninterrupted views over the Arabian Gulf
- **Savour daily buffet breakfast at LIV**, with live cooking stations and poolside dining
- **Nightly gourmet buffet dinner at LIV** or AED150 dining credit per person, per day to use at W Dubai's dining venues, including Michelin-Starred Torno Subito. Or make the most of your dining credit at over 130 Dubai venues with Marriot Bonvoy's 'Dine Around' program
- **Buy one, get one free** on select house drinks at Happy Hour from 4pm to 6pm at WET Deck, the adults-only beach club, and W Lounge, a glam pad with views over Dubai
- **Enjoy 20% discount on massages at AWAY Spa** so you can recharge in style
- **Up to two children (under 12) stay free**, sleeping on existing bedding

FROM

£649

Two adults
Valued up to £2,324

3 NIGHTS

Suite upgrades & longer stays available

Buy now, choose dates later
travel until **04 DEC 2024**

Reasons why customers across the globe love booking with Luxury Escapes[#]

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Exceptional value. Unlock exclusive extras and the best rates ✓ Exclusive packages. Our experts negotiate the best inclusions ✓ All in one place: hotel packages, flights, tours and experiences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Travel the world. We can take you to thousands of destinations ✓ 24/7 customer service. Our call centre is always open for our customers ✓ Deposits now available. Secure your escape now and pay later |
|---|--|

 LUXURY ESCAPES.COM | **0800 060 8235**

7-Day Change of Mind Refund Guarantee



SCAN TO SEE OFFER

Travel SOLO ADVENTURE SPECIAL



PRISMA BY DUVAS, JOHN DAMBIR/LAWY, PETER UNGER/GETTY IMAGES

BEYOND RUSHMORE

Welcome to your 50th state: you saved the best for last!" reads a window sticker in the North Dakota gas station, as tumbleweed rolls past. Here in the Midwest, in one of the most sparsely populated – and least-visited – of all of the US states, the grassy plains are so flat you could score a poker-straight line across the horizon, aside from the occasional silhouetted punctuation mark of a grazing bison. In North Dakota cattle outnumber humans by a beefy three to one. It's also the kind of place where tourism has mostly revolved around road-tripping fishermen and hunters sporting head-to-toe camouflage.

Visitor stereotypes might have to change, however, with the recent launch of a coach

Most visitors to North and South Dakota come for the sculpted mountain. But a new tour of the little-known states offers incredible insight into Native American culture too, says *Zoey Goto*



tour encompassing both North and South Dakota, operated by the family-owned travel company Trafalgar, in consultation with the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association. Departing from South Dakota's Rapid City, known as the gateway to Mount Rushmore, the eight-night itinerary snakes along scenic byways, taking in sights and a carousel of basic but clean roadside motels before a climatic finale at North Dakota's Theodore Roosevelt National Park. I sign up for the inaugural tour, enticed by the promise of exploring the great

outdoors while learning about the Tribal Nations of North and South Dakota – a region where more than 8 per cent of the population are of Native American heritage (nationally the proportion is 2.6 per cent). I could have tried something like this independently, but it's such new territory for tourists, with more logistics than a regular road trip, that I was happy to let someone else do the organising.

We're venturing into uncharted territory, our chipper travel director Randy Ley is quick to warn during his welcome-night speech. "Please bear with us, as this is

the first time that many of the Native American reservations have allowed coach tours in," he tells our group of 25, largely comprised of amiable American retirees.

"We'll also be visiting some of the poorest counties in the country. But the people we'll meet along the way are excited to share their culture," Ley says, as we are treated to a dazzling dance performed by two Lakota tribal members, the stage becoming a colourful riot of swirling ribbons, feathered headdresses and pounding drums.

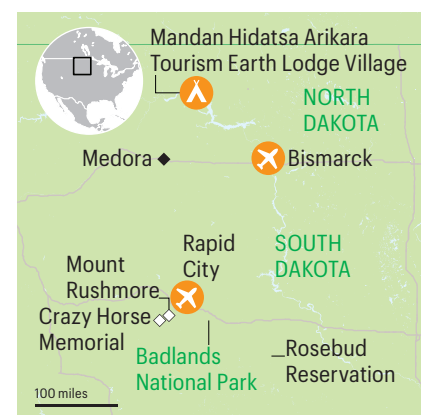
Over the next couple of days we wear a groove into the Badlands Loop Road as our cherry-red coach glides through the otherworldly geography of South Dakota's Badlands National Park, past prairie dogs and bighorn sheep. Nearby we disembark to tilt our heads skywards towards the familiar faces of four American presidents – Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt and Lincoln – writ large across the granite wall of Mount Rushmore. Although this may be South Dakota's calling card, attracting more than two million visitors annually, just down the road there's another colossal stone-faced monument just as deserving of the spotlight.

The Crazy Horse Memorial was created in response to the sculptures at nearby Mount Rushmore – controversially

Continued on page 12 →



Members of the Lakota tribe in Black Hills, South Dakota, main picture. A bison grazing in the Badlands prairie in North Dakota, above left. The Crazy Horse Memorial near Mount Rushmore, left



Travel SOLO ADVENTURE SPECIAL

→ Continued from page 11

etched into the Black Hills, a region considered sacred by its original residents. Rather than immortalising US presidents, Crazy Horse is a towering homage to the Oglala Lakota chief, depicting a warrior astride a horse with a flowing mane.

Or it will be, at least. Crazy Horse is the world's largest mountain carving in progress, Ley tells us via crackling microphone as our coach trundles along a dirt track to

the base of the monument, where baseball-capped tourists are collecting lumps of fallen rock as if they're nuggets of precious gold. It has been 75 years in the making and to the untrained eye looks to be only halfway finished. From the comfort of the onsite restaurant I watch a team of specialist Mountain Crew members chiselling meticulously slowly, before browsing through displays of Native American beading and dreamcatcher talismans in the dinky museum.



It's my first group coach tour and while big bus journeys have never been top of my travel bucket list, I'm warming to it more with every mile. Group camaraderie has been a natural consequence of living life on the road and eating communally in a land where the dish of the day is, more often than not, bison meat.

Beyond companionship, an organised tour also makes it much easier to visit the reservations of the Dakotas, patchworks of land governed by a Native American tribal nation that operates as a semi-sovereign government. To get the real insight you want, you need access to the right people and the capacity to piece it all together. Indigenous tourism in the US is gaining momentum, accounting for about £32 billion in 2022. But certain communities in the Dakotas are clearly more familiar with laying on visitor experiences than others.

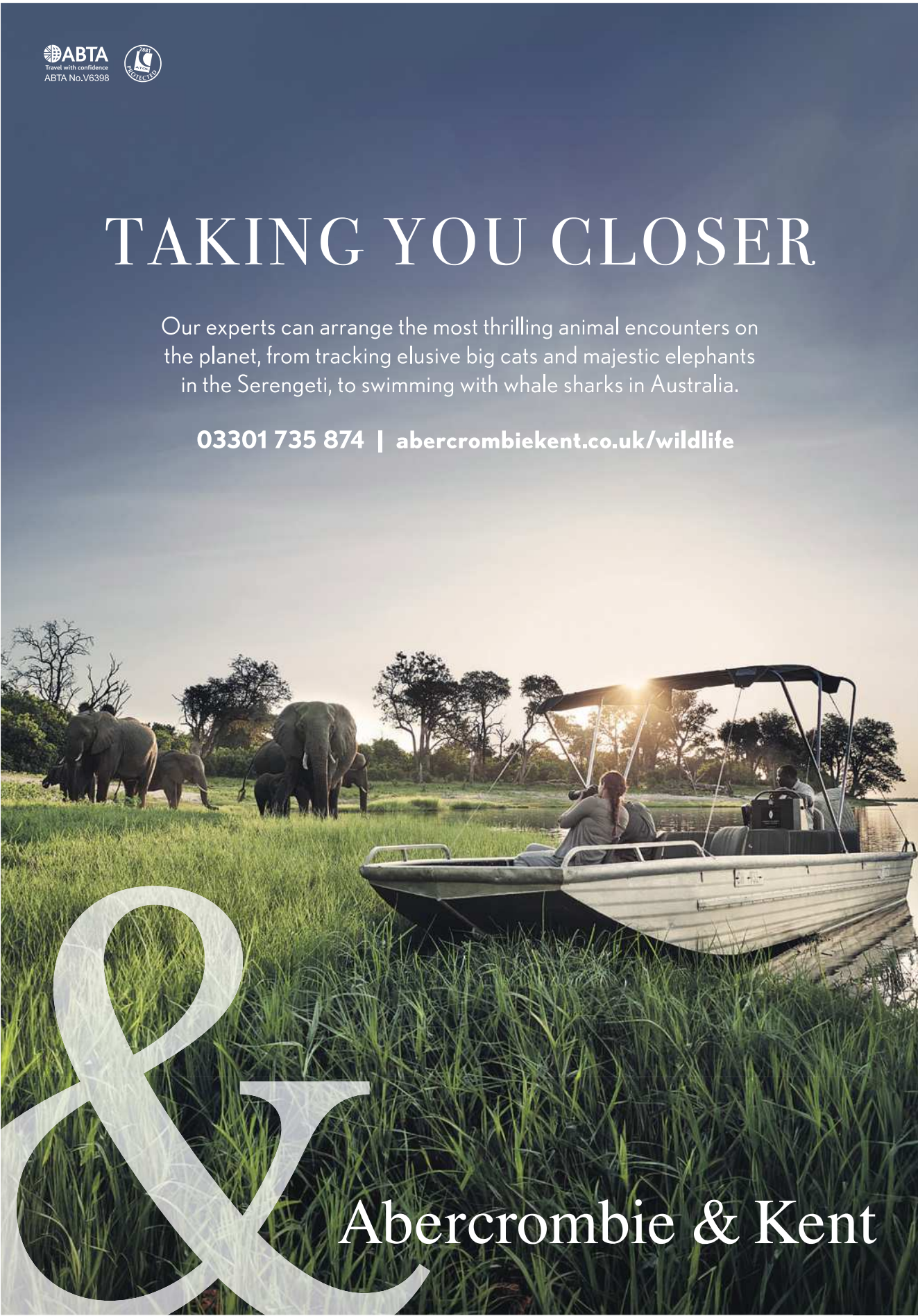
Take, for example, the Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Tourism Earth Lodge Village in North Dakota, a slick operation where they've hung



a vast banner at the entrance to greet our Trafalgar tour group. With views of the swaying grasses of the Northern Plains, we enjoy a spectacular display of powwow dancing by young male tribal members; a tour of the cavernous earth houses showcases how the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara peoples once lived. Following an

impressive display of tepee building – a matter of a cool three minutes for a couple of local grandmas, we're told – we feast on traditional bison steak and fry bread (like tacos but made with flour and deep-fried). The smart dining room has panoramic views across the tranquil waters of Lake Sakakawea.

In contrast, we break new ground by visiting the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. This is the first coachload of tourists to be hosted here, Teddie Rae Herman, a resident, says as she steps onto the bus. Armed with Tupperware boxes of homemade muffins, she's an instant hit with the group as we drive past tiny, narrow shotgun houses. "You'll notice that housing is pretty limited,"

“Bison roam the prairies and wild horses gallop alongside the coach”





TAKING YOU CLOSER

Our experts can arrange the most thrilling animal encounters on the planet, from tracking elusive big cats and majestic elephants in the Serengeti, to swimming with whale sharks in Australia.

03301 735 874 | abercrombiekent.co.uk/wildlife

Abercrombie & Kent



DON SMETZER, SHERRY TALBOT, HEMIS, DANITA DELMONT/ALAMY



Badlands National Park, top left. The Rough Riders Hotel in Medora, left. A young boy at a powwow in Bismarck, and Theodore Roosevelt National Park, above

Herman says, making no attempt to sugar-coat the visible poverty that is the result of an unemployment rate of about 80 per cent.

The Rosebud Reservation is also a place where hope flourishes, though, as we discover when we pull up chairs at the outdoor meadow theatre that has been supported by the Lakota Youth Development organisation. A group of shy teenagers overcome their stage fright to perform a play about reclaiming their language and culture. We learn about the nearby micro-farm created by a passionate young chef, Matthew Wilson, that now nourishes the local community.

At each of the four reservations we visit, our group is met with genuine warmth. It must help that the Trafalgar itinerary has been created from scratch in collaboration with Native American tribes; also that 90 per cent of the experiences on offer are indigenous-owned or operated, with fees paid directly to cut out the middleman. "It's important that we have the agency to finally tell our own stories," Herman says.

During our final stop in Medora, North Dakota, we find cowboy saloons set against the dramatic backdrop of jagged bluffs, in a town boasting a population of 121. It was here that Theodore Roosevelt came to grieve after the crushing death of his wife and mother on the same day, finding solace in the freedom of the all-embracing wilderness. Roosevelt's time in North Dakota later guided his conservation policies, so it's a fitting culmination to spend the night in the fantastically kitsch Wild West-themed Rough Riders Hotel, named after the volunteer cavalry unit led by America's 26th president.

At daybreak on our final morning, there's not a soul in sight as we amble through Theodore Roosevelt National Park, a sweep of epic rock and grasslands where bison roam the prairies and wild horses gallop alongside the coach. Up on a craggy mountain ridge we stop to soak up the unending vistas that helped to shape the history of the US, from the Native American hunting grounds across to the log cabin ranch where Roosevelt took his broken heart. It's a landscape that whispers of American legends, a place worth visiting long before you've ticked off the other 49 states.

Zoey Goto was a guest of Travel South Dakota (travelsouthdakota.com) and Trafalgar, which has eight nights' B&B from £2,795pp, including transfers and some extra meals, on its National Parks & Native Trails of the Dakotas tour (trafalgar.com). Fly to Rapid City and from Bismarck

THREE MORE OFFBEAT US TOURS

NEW JERSEY ROAD TRIP

There's a lot more to the Garden State of New Jersey than its nearby big-hitters, New York and Philadelphia. Go beyond the cities on this freshly curated road

trip from the scenic islands of Cape May to the bright lights of Jersey City and you will discover a destination steeped in small-town charm and colourful coastal holiday spots.

Details Seven nights' room only from £1,180pp, including flights and car hire (americaasyoulikeit.com)

LITTLE-KNOWN NATIONAL PARKS

The highlight of this ten-day tour through some of America's less celebrated national parks is a visit to the beautiful New River Gorge National Park in West Virginia, which became the latest US National Park in December 2020. You'll also cover some serious ground, starting in

Washington DC and rounding things off in Nashville, with pitstops in the hippy-friendly mountain town of Asheville and a glorious hike through the Great Smoky

Mountains National Park.

Details Nine nights' B&B from £3,023pp, including transport and some extra meals

(insightvacations.com).

Fly to Washington DC and from Nashville

SNOWY ACTIVITY IN COLORADO

This all-action tour, above, swings from skijoring (skiing pulled by horses or dogs) to tackling a four-mile run at an ultra-luxe ski resort in scenic Vail. Along the way there will be cosy ranch stays, farm-to-table cuisine and pampering spa treatments after a long day on the slopes.

Details Thirteen nights' B&B from £3,905pp, including flights and car hire (originaltravel.co.uk)



Choose to Cruise

Choose from many other **luxury cruises** on our website

Calls answered LIVE in 5 seconds

Thailand and Vietnam Cruise 5*

All inclusive in a Veranda Stateroom with private balcony



Departs 8 Feb 2024

See the highlights of **Thailand** and **Vietnam** onboard Celebrity Solstice whilst cruising from **Singapore** to **Koh Samui, Bangkok/Laemchabang, Ho Chi Minh, Nha Trang, Hue/Danang** and **Halong Bay**. Disembark in **Hong Kong**. There's a huge variety of activities and entertainment on board, as well as a number of bars and restaurants.

12 nights fr £3,789pp Inc flights

Norwegian Fjords Cruise 5*

All inclusive in an Oceanview Stateroom + \$50 credit



Departs 15 May 2024

Departing Southampton onboard Celebrity Apex, you'll visit **Nordfjordeid, Flam, Geiranger, Alesund, Kiristansand** and disembark back in **Southampton**. Your ship offers a wealth of activities and entertainment with a rooftop garden, solarium, pool deck, spa and theatre. There are also 29 restaurants, bars and lounges to explore.

8 nights fr £1,599pp

Alaskan Cruise 5*

All inclusive in an Oceanview Stateroom



Departs 12 May 2024

Cruise from **Vancouver** to **Icy Strait Point, Skagway, Endicott Arm Fjord, Juneau, Ketchikan**, through the **Inside Passage** again and back to **Vancouver** on board Celebrity Solstice. There's a huge variety of activities and entertainment as well as a number of bars & restaurants. Plus 1 pre-cruise night in Vancouver at the **Fairmont Waterfront**.

8 nights fr £2,119pp Inc flights

Egypt and Israel Cruise 5*

All inclusive in an Oceanview Stateroom



Departs 23 Feb 2024

For fascinating history and ancient architecture, board this Celebrity Infinity cruise from **Athens** (Greece) to **Haifa** (Israel), **Jerusalem** (Israel), **Alexandria** (Egypt) and back to **Athens** where you will disembark. There's a huge choice of restaurants and bars on board, and a whole host of activities and entertainment to keep you busy night and day.

10 nights fr £1,429pp Inc flights

DialAFlight

0330-100-2213



CLIENT TRUST ACCOUNT



ATOL Protected



ABTA No 76705



THE **No.1** TRAVEL COMPANY

★★★★★

Trustpilot

12,073 reviews



Our September Sale Is Here!

DEPOSITS FROM £99pp^ | FLEXIBLE PAYMENT OPTIONS | ATOL PROTECTED



5★ ATLANTIS THE ROYAL DUBAI

5 Nights Bed & Breakfast
NOW from **£1,799pp**
FOR TRAVEL 03-30 JUN 2024

INCLUDES DIRECT FLIGHTS
1ST CHILD EATS & STAYS **FREE**
COMPLIMENTARY ACCESS
TO AQUAVENTURE
WATER PARK



5★ COUPLES SANS SOUCI, JAMAICA

7 Nights All Inclusive NOW from **£1,675pp**
FOR TRAVEL 04-30 JUN 2024

INCLUDES DIRECT FLIGHTS &
COMPLIMENTARY AIRPORT TRANSFERS
SAVE 45%



5★ MAJESTIC ELEGANCE COSTA MUJERES, CANCUN

7 Nights Premium All Inclusive NOW from **£1,599pp**
FOR TRAVEL 04-17 OCT 2023

INCLUDES DIRECT FLIGHTS
SAVE 30%



5★ CONSTANCE BELLE MARE PLAGE, MAURITIUS

7 Nights All Inclusive NOW from **£2,320pp**
FOR TRAVEL 01-31 MAY 2024

RETURN INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS &
PRIVATE CAR TRANSFERS
SAVE UP TO 35%



5★ LUX* SOUTH ARI ATOLL, MALDIVES

7 Nights All Inclusive NOW from **£3,240pp**
FOR TRAVEL 05-31 OCT 2023

FLASH SALE OFFER! SAVE 40% AND **FREE**
UPGRADE FROM FULL BOARD TO ALL INCLUSIVE
INCLUDES RETURN SEAPLANE TRANSFERS!



5★ O2 BEACH CLUB & SPA, BARBADOS

7 Nights All Inclusive
NOW from **£2,099pp**
FOR TRAVEL 16-31 MAY 2024

SAVE 60%
COMPLIMENTARY UPGRADE
TO OCEAN VIEW
JUNIOR SUITE



5★ SANTIBURI KOH SAMUI, THAILAND

10 Nights Bed & Breakfast
NOW from **£1,984pp**
FOR TRAVEL 01 OCT-15 DEC 2023

INCLUDES FLIGHTS & ONE
ROYAL THAI DINNER FOR TWO
SAVE 35%



5★ JA PALM TREE COURT, DUBAI

5 Nights Half Board NOW from **£1,059pp**
FOR TRAVEL 05-30 JUN 2024

INCLUDES DIRECT FLIGHTS
KIDS STAY & EAT **FREE**
SAVE 40%



5★ RAFFLES THE PALM DUBAI

5 Nights Half Board NOW from **£1,139pp**
FOR TRAVEL 03-30 JUN 2024

INCLUDES DIRECT FLIGHTS
KIDS STAY & EAT **FREE**
SAVE 35%



5★ W ABU DHABI - YAS ISLAND

5 Nights Half Board NOW from **£1,029pp**
FOR TRAVEL 01-30 JUN 2024

INCLUDES DIRECT FLIGHTS
SAVE 40%



5★ ONE&ONLY ARABIAN COURT

5 Nights Half Board NOW from **£1,399pp**
FOR TRAVEL 10-30 JUN 2024

INCLUDES DIRECT FLIGHTS | 1ST CHILD
STAYS & EATS **FREE** | **COMPLIMENTARY**
ACCESS TO AQUAVENTURE WATER PARK



5★ ATLANTIS THE PALM, DUBAI

5 Nights Half Board
NOW from **£1,389pp**
FOR TRAVEL 03 JUN-19 JUL 2024

+ **£189pp** FOR TRAVEL IN SEP 2023
KIDS STAY & EAT **FREE**
COMPLIMENTARY ACCESS TO
AQUAVENTURE WATERPARK



5★ ONE&ONLY THE PALM, DUBAI

5 Nights Half Board
NOW from **£1,929pp**
FOR TRAVEL 10-30 JUN 2024

INCLUDES DIRECT FLIGHTS
STAY 5 & PAY 4
COMPLIMENTARY ACCESS TO
AQUAVENTURE WATERPARK

Luxury Holidays Made Affordable



BEST AT TRAVEL

Call 020 3993 3759

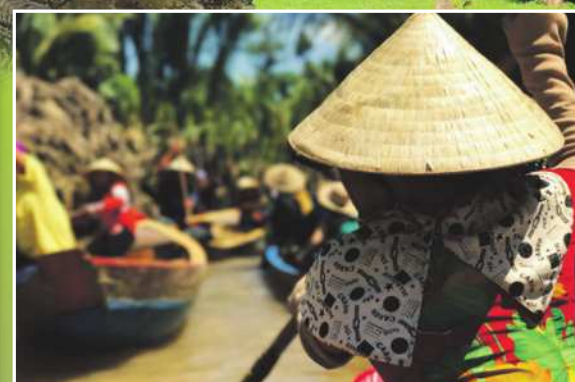
bestattravel.co.uk

Offers are subject to availability and include international flights and taxes from London. Prices are per person based on two adults travelling unless otherwise stated. Holidays are subject to availability, exclusions & school holiday supplements may apply. Visit bestattravel.co.uk for full terms and conditions. ^Payment by deposit only valid when booking more than 12 weeks in advance of travel.

Essential Vietnam & Cambodia

**Sale
Now On!**

Save 15%
on this tour



SCAN HERE FOR OUR EXPERT GUIDE



16 nights from £2,249

Including flights and small group adventure
tour incl 14 nights hotels, 1 night junk boat,
1 night sleeper train, experienced tour leader,
selected sightseeing & 20 meals

Saving over £200 per person

DAYS 1-3 Hanoi & Halong Bay, Vietnam

Begin in Vietnam's bustling capital before taking a cruise through the iconic limestone peaks of Halong Bay.

DAYS 4-7 Hue & Hoi An

Take in the colour and the culture of Central Vietnam with stops in historic Hue and charming Hoi An.

DAYS 8-10 Ho Chi Minh City & the Mekong Delta

Experience the contrasts of the south by visiting both the energetic streets of Ho Chi Minh City and the serene canals of the Mekong Delta.

DAYS 11-15 Phnom Penh & Siem Reap, Cambodia

Learn about the fascinating history of Cambodia, from the sobering Killing Fields in Phnom Penh to the legendary Angkor Temples near Siem Reap.

DAYS 16-17 Bangkok, Thailand

Spend one final night in Bangkok before flying home.



ALL YOUR TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS TAKEN CARE OF IN ONE PLACE



Call **TRAILFINDERS** on **020 7938 0223** or visit your local Travel Centre

Prices are per person based on a twin/double share & valid for selected Oct departures. Offers are subject to availability & restrictions may apply. Prices correct at time of going to print 31 Aug 23.



"Truly excellent: patient, friendly, helpful
& a mine of knowledge, tips and advice."



THE WILD CANARY

Alpine forest, ancient lava terraces and black pebble beaches: a self-guided hiking trip to La Gomera makes next-door Tenerife feel a world away. By *Mark Stratton*

‘When you first see La Gomera it looks like the island of King Kong, covered with mist – you’ll love it,” said Aznar Fernández de Pinedo, who was organising the logistics for my seven-day solo self-guided hike.

Back in September 2021, aboard the ferry from Tenerife to the neighbouring island of La Palma to witness its erupting volcano, I glanced south, to be captivated by the fearsome outline of the distant La Gomera – lushly green, with doughnuts of mist encircling chimneys of volcanic lava. Whether it was Herodotus’ Garden of Hesperides, as has been claimed, or the abode of Hollywood monsters, I felt as if it were my destiny to return. It’s ideal for winter and spring walking – temperatures remain pleasant from October to May – and the island is at its height of verdancy then.

Neither supersized primates nor Fay Wray are on show during the 50-minute ferry ride from Tenerife this time.

Yet my sense of awe intensifies. For three million years since its last eruption, the rainfall collected by ancient laurel forests has permeated down through the dark volcanic flanks, sculpting yawning barrancos (ravines). The waves pounding the coarse black pebble beaches are foamy and fierce.

Which is why, rather than beachgoers, La Gomera targets hikers, with well-marked footpaths crisscrossing the island. “You can rent a car and see it in two days, but real immersion is to feel the rough volcanic terrain beneath your boots,” Aznar told me before I travelled. “Then, when you try the wine or food, you can relate it to the ground you’ve stepped on.”

Disembarking in San Sebastian de La Gomera I take a taxi to Hermigua village in the upper barrancos. Its 16th-century prosperity from exporting sugarcane and

bananas to Europe is easily imagined during an afternoon spent stretching my legs down the Barranco de Monteforte, en route to Playa de la Caleta. Banana plantations fill the ravine all the way to the beach, where the ebbing tide rakes the pebbled shoreline as noisily as shaken ball bearings. My swimwear stays in my bag.

Actually, the arcadian fecundity is a terrible tease. It’s late May and I’m too early for the myriad fruits to have ripened. The dates and figs are immature, papayas and bananas too green and I bash my head on a low-hanging rock-hard avocado. Yet the abundant grapevines sprawling across the lava-stone terraces, notably the endemic forastera Gomera, hint at fermented pleasures ahead. There’s something satisfying about drinking artisanal wines where the appellation is literally underfoot. And later I duly

settle back with a €1 glass of vino blanco at a village bar called Submarino. The wine is minerally dry. I can taste the volcanic soil.

Next morning I begin a 12-mile hike from my hotel in Hermigua to another in Vallehermoso (my luggage will be transferred by van). Aznar can help to shorten hikes using local buses or taxis. But that would mean missing out on an ever-changing landscape that leaves me feeling as if I’m toiling through desert in dry gullies of prickly pear one minute and rambling through cool alpine pinewoods the next.

What is inescapable is a prevailing timelessness, not defined by built heritage or cultural traditions but the same silence that generations of islanders would have heard before me. Alone in its wilderness, I find this background silence intensifies the elemental world. All week long I don’t notice hearing an aeroplane passing overhead.

Such silence made it easy to see why the old island whistling language worked. Called Silbo Gomero, it was

used by the pre-Hispanic settlers, the Guanches, to communicate over long distances and is still taught in schools here today.

The walk to Vallehermoso is arduous. I leave the coast behind on the GR132 track around Agulo, where the lava terraces front like an ancient ziggurat. Beyond, I dig in for a tortuous one-hour stepped ascent inland in full sunshine to Mirador de Abrante.

I stop for lunch in the welcome shade of a botanical garden at Juego de Bolas, where the café is run by a fourth-generation biscuit-maker. She bakes them from gofio, a toasted cereal flour. I hungrily devour two, one flavoured with aniseed and another with lemon. From here an old shepherd’s track rustling with flighty lizards leads to a distant sighting of Vallehermoso. The mountain town is exquisitely pretty. Terracotta-tiled roofs poke through the barrancos’ rampant vegetation. It’s overlooked by a lofty volcanic plug shaped like the pointed fang of Kong’s old foe, Godzilla, called Roque Cano,

“
The background
silence
intensifies the
elemental world



MARTIN SIERMANN/GETTY IMAGES; JOSE LUIS MENDEZ FERNANDEZ, IMAGEROCKER, ASHLEY COOPER/ALAMY



Mirador de Abrante near Agulo has views of Tenerife, left. The parador in San Sebastian de La Gomera, above. Vallehermoso, below. En route to a lava spike near Benchijigua, bottom



which alternates in and out of view during a lengthy zigzagging descent down to Vallehermoso's main plaza.

Pulling off my boots knowing I've worked hard for my evening is a joyous feeling. The plaza begins to liven up at about 6pm – La Gomera's wilds may be silent but the island remains very much lived in. Villagers of all ages emerge from siestas and I watch them from a little open-air bar drinking gomerón, an aperitif of guarapo, a honeyed sap tapped from palm, and brandy.

Although La Gomera isn't really a foodie destination, there are a few restaurants in town serving standard Spanish menu fare – pork tenderloin, tortilla, tuna. But island produce can be teased out. And it's often delicious. Aubergines glazed with guarapo and a pâté rendered from hard goat's cheese called almogrote. Longer hikes are easily fuelled by the carbohydrate whack of oven-cooked papas arrugadas ("wrinkled potatoes") dipped in chilli-hot red or coriander-green mojo (sauce).

I eat well in Vallehermoso. For breakfast at the Hotel Añaterve, the co-owner Amala picks me a ripe (hooray) avocado and serves it with home-baked raisin bread. She runs the hotel with her Belgian partner, Herman. They arrived from Amsterdam 22 years ago, bought the dilapidated building and transformed it into a five-room hotel.

"The house has a bad history, though," Herman says. Vallehermoso was a hotbed of resistance to Franco. "This mansion was confiscated by the Civil Guard in 1936 as Franco's fascists launched the civil war. Rebels opposing Franco holed up here but surrendered and were executed," he says.

For contrast, the next day's hike through Garajonay National Park to Chipude on the western coastline is heavenly. The flora remains eclectic juniper, bamboo, prickly pear and date palms. Everything grows here. The Garden of Hesperides after all? The primordial silence is broken only by ravens' throaty clucks.

A narrow ridge guides me above 3,000ft into Garajonay's ancient laurisilva, moisture-

laden laurel forests that are among the oldest in the EU and vital to nourishing the agricultural barrancos below. In 2012 a huge fire burnt through 6,600 acres of the forest as drought gripped the Canary Islands. Now the forest is flushing green. A chiaroscuro light permeates the waxy evergreen leaves. The trailing beards of lichen and mossy trunks remind me of wildwood fragments near my Dartmoor home.

By contrast Chipude is tinder-dry. I arrive after six hours' walking to this village of 600 residents, a hotel/bar and a 17th-century limewashed church. It sits above several deep canyons ribbed by lengthy sweeps of terraces – their alternating black walls and dried yellowing grass form bumblebee stripes across the landscape.

The view is even better from La Gomera's nearby landmark, La Fortaleza – a 4,000ft-high isolated knoll not unlike the one in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. The next morning I hike up to it after sunrise. A stone-cut staircase leads on to a flat-topped plateau, where I hunt unsuccessfully for sacrificial altars of the Guanches. Historical records show that when the Spanish launched a brutal offensive on La Gomera in 1489, the Guanches took refuge on such plateaux, believing these sacred mountaintops would offer them sanctuary. Their belief didn't help them; the Spaniards were merciless.

Sanctuary beckons for me the next day back in San Sebastian. I end with another barnstorming walk. Beyond the island's highest point – Alto de Garajonay, at 4,878ft – are giant heather and wax myrtle forests on the way to Benchijigua. Here, vertical lava spikes soar like an octopus raising its tentacles during a bank heist. My knees have surrendered by Degollada, so I jump on a bus for the final few miles.

Fortunately I booked an extra night in San Sebastian's luxurious Parador de la Gomera. With red-tiled patio gardens of cactus and tropical succulents, it's high on the cliffs above the town's small harbour. Silence is now lost to the bustling cityscape. But no matter, because as I soak, weary yet ecstatic in the parador swimming pool, I look across the sea to the 12,000ft Mount Teide volcano back on Tenerife. If La Gomera could be King Kong's abode, what giants of the imagination, I wonder, might lurk on that distant peak.

Mark Stratton was a guest of On Foot Holidays, which has seven nights' B&B from £980pp, including ferry, luggage transfers, route descriptions and maps (onfootholidays.co.uk). Fly to Tenerife

Dazzling Dubai

Calls answered LIVE in 5 seconds

Choose from **180 luxury hotels and villas** on our website

Four Seasons Resort Dubai 5*

Save 30% + free breakfast



- A traveller's playground with the waters of the Arabian Gulf on one side and Dubai's cityscape on the other
- 237 ultra-spacious rooms & suites, 12 restaurants & bars, a sumptuous spa and endless water sports

5 nights fr £2,015pp Inc flights

Atlantis, The Palm 5*

Save 25% on half board + 2 kids stay free



- Family-friendly rooms & luxury suites with Palm or sea view. Access to the world's largest Aquaventure Waterpark
- There are 36 restaurants and bars with Two Michelin Star restaurants, plus private Imperial Club Lounge

5 nights fr £1,895pp Inc flights



One&Only The Palm 5*

Save 20% + free half board

- Dubai's only boutique beachfront resort, nestled in the most exclusive location on the Palm
- Stunning Andalusian architecture, enchanting gardens, shimmering pools and three captivating restaurants by celebrity chef Yannick Alleno

5 nights fr £2,495pp Inc flights

Jumeirah Dar Al Masyaf 5*

Save 40% on half board



- Set amongst tranquil gardens, waterways, exclusive pools and Madinat Jumeirah's private beach
- Offering elegant, spacious guestrooms & courtyards, personalised butler service and understated Arabian luxury

5 nights fr £1,995pp Inc flights

Caesars Palace Dubai 5*

Save 45% on dine around half board



- 500m private beach with uninterrupted sea views, 5 temperature-controlled outdoor pools and an Amalfi-inspired adults only Venus Beach Club
- Epic dining experiences including Gordon Ramsay's Hell's Kitchen

5 nights fr £1,755pp Inc flights

DialAFlight

0330-100-2213

CLIENT TRUST ACCOUNT

ATOL Protected

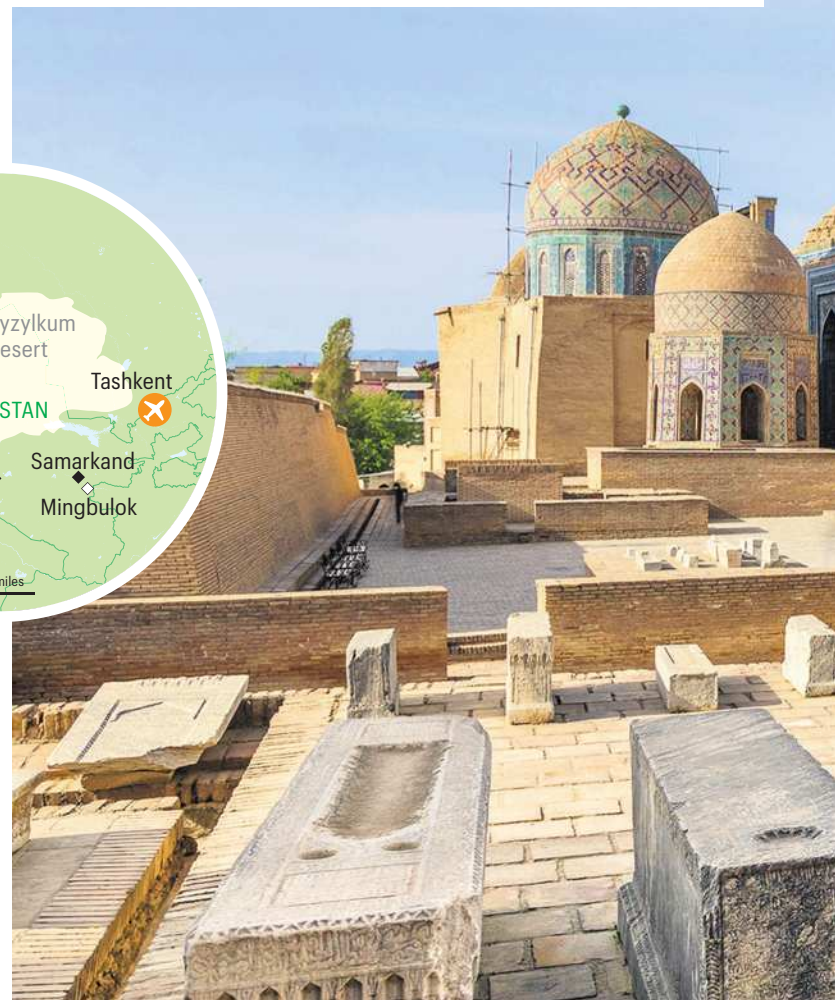
ABTA ABTA No 76705

BRITISH AIRWAYS Preferred Partner

THE No.1 TRAVEL COMPANY
★★★★★
Trustpilot
12,073 reviews

GOING IT ALONE THE SILK ROAD

Lucy Perrin retraces the footsteps of merchants past on a private tour of Uzbekistan's magical bazaars and minarets



My guide, Mashkhura, is enjoying an early morning wander along the back streets of Bukhara when she sees a black cat. She takes seven steps back, spits twice to the left and asks for the bad luck to leave.

But it seems the ritual doesn't work. A few hours later, as we're driving across the Kyzylkum desert, our van claps out in the middle of nowhere. "We have a saying in Uzbekistan," Mashkhura says, one sceptical eyebrow raised as our driver, Abdullah, props open the bonnet and peers mystified at the silent engine. "Even if a man wants to slaughter a tiny sparrow he should call a butcher to do it." It doesn't feel like the moment to ask if there's an Uzbek equivalent for the phrase "up the creek without a paddle".

Abdullah is no mechanic and thankfully he doesn't try to turn into one. He flags down a passing car to take him to the nearest village to find help and we wait, wondering when, if, we'll see him again. With no air con the van feels like a tin can with windows. It's a lip-cracking 45C and the water bottle I nonchalantly finished earlier rolls around in the footwell, mocking me. This is the only moment during my 12-day tour of Uzbekistan that I question whether taking the trip on my own was a good idea. But two sweaty hours later we're back on the road.



The Shah-i-Zinda necropolis in Samarkand, above right. A mosque in Bukhara, above. A fortress at Ayaz-Kala, left. Spices in a Tashkent bazaar, below. Lucy exploring a mausoleum in Khiva, right



Uzbekistan is hardly a popular destination for Britons – only about 10,000 visit each year – and the idea of navigating the central Asian country solo had felt a little daunting. However, I wasn't keen on joining a group tour, so I opted for the middle ground: a private tour with a local guide where I could learn as much as possible while in safe hands. Better still, there would be no planning on my end and high-speed trains and low-cost internal flights were tickets to seeing the highlights in one visit.

Uzbekistan, a seven-hour flight from London, is at the heart of the Silk Road, a network of trading routes that connected the Far East to the western world for more than 1,500 years. From the second century BC to the 15th century, the Silk Road crossed more than 4,000 miles of mountains and deserts, passing through 40 countries and facilitating trade along the way. Much of this exchange was transactional and tangible – reels of silk from China for handfuls of precious jewels from India – but it also extended to the invisible and transformational: religious revelations and cultural practices that were observed and shared by the likes of Marco Polo.

Uzbekistan's capital, Tashkent, was

a popular spot for caravanserais (essentially roadside campsites), and Chorsu Bazaar, located at a crossroads, was one of them. Today the horses, wagons and Marco Polo-types are long gone, but a thriving local market stands in their place. There's a whole floor dedicated to desserts that showcase the sweetest of Uzbek traditions: elaborate engagement gifts made from halva (a cross between nougat and fudge) and mountains of crystallised amber sugar that mothers place on the tongues of newborns, believing the ritual will help them to sweet-talk future customers once they become traders. I spend hours wandering the equivalent of the middle of Lidl, a floor stacked with everything from brooms that are gifted as part of a dowry to sacks full of juniper leaves used to flavour meat while it cooks.

At the outdoor bakery a multitude of cooks oversee giant clay tandoor ovens, watching discs of circular bread turn gold as they cling to the oven walls like bats in a cave. One baker throws a frisbee of dough across the room and catches my eye, smiling the same big, gold-toothed grin as most other Uzbeks over 50. It's a shiny reminder that less than 30 years ago the country was still under Soviet rule

“
The thriving local market is the equivalent of the middle of Lidl

ON



SERGEY DZVUBA, MEHMETO, ANDREW WILSON/ALAMY, GREGOR SAWATSKI, UIDS LAGANOVSKI/GETTY IMAGES, LUCY PERRIN

If Uzbekistan's sights outshine those in Europe, however, its hotels do not. My riad-style stays look pretty on the outside but often lack the basics inside – no kettles in the room or toasters at breakfast and, in one, a mattress so thin that I wonder, half-asleep at 3am, if I'm sleeping on a Ryvita crispbread.

A more pleasant surprise is the eight-hour drive from Khiva to Bukhara, which isn't the slog it first sounds. The Khorezm region is known as the land of a thousand fortresses and as the carpets of desert unroll around us, abandoned citadels rise up from the sand. We break the journey at Ayaz-Kala, a collection of three citadels that date back as far as the 4th century, and explore the remains of rooms where royalty once roamed. There's not another soul in sight and the only guards are a group of jade-green hummingbirds that circle the ruins and keep watch from above.

The first sign that we've arrived in Bukhara are the city's original trading domes, which initially appear like a cluster of stone molehills. Beneath their curved roofs men embroider pomegranates – symbols of fertility – on to cushion covers and forge silver scissors into the shape of swallows.

Equally well preserved is the city's Poi-Kalyan complex, a set of monuments so astonishingly beautiful that I almost get teary-eyed, but it's nothing compared to what awaits in our next stop: Samarkand.

The big-name act in the Silk Road's most famous city is Registan, a square containing three intricate madrassas with gleaming turquoise cupolas. The buildings are hypnotic by day, covered as they are in thousands of mosaics and Zoroastrian symbols, my favourite a huge pair of tigers that stretch over a doorway. And the spectacle is equally magical by night, when the locals munch on buckets of popcorn and watch the square glow gold and green as the sun sinks. I realise the only thing that could make the show better is having my guide, who at this point feels more like a friend, there to watch it with me. That's the thing about travelling solo, I realise: often the best part is who you meet along the way. Especially when it's someone who knows the place inside out and won't laugh when you ask if they can walk you back to your hotel to avoid any strange men on the way.

There's more magic 25 miles from Samarkand at Mingbulok, a village said to have one million springs and a shrine that brings good luck. Families come to wash in the holy water of the stream and generations gather on thick blood-red Persian carpets to picnic together. Daughters sweat over pots of steaming plov (rice topped with beef and dried apricots); sons carry huge canisters of tea and grandmothers sit back, bouncing babies and swapping stories.

A trickle of weddings and grooms head to the shrine, housed in a cave, to be blessed. I stoop inside and spot the local imam praying with all who enter. The cave, he says, is a sacred spot, and while I'm here I need to think carefully of what I most want to come true. I bow my head, place my hands together and ask for no more black cats.

Lucy Perrin was a guest of Wild Frontiers, which has nine nights' B&B from £2,705pp on a private Classic Uzbekistan tour, including guided excursions and transfers (wildfrontierstravel.com). Fly to Tashkent

and gold teeth were a sign of wealth. Go underground and you'll see more Soviet scars running across the skin of the city. Subway stations are modelled on those on the Moscow metro, each a work of art with decorations carved from alabaster and lit by glitzy chandeliers, and manned by equally immaculate workers in jade-green uniforms and square caps. Then there's the brutalist Hotel Uzbekistan, a hotel so ugly it feels only right that it should have been preserved as a sort of historical monument.

Ancient Khiva is at the other end of the beauty spectrum. This glorious walled city is essentially an open-air museum, its great monuments stuffed inside a series of wooden gates that traders would have passed through in the days of the Silk Road. There has been a mini-sandstorm on the day I arrive and the city is so deserted that wandering through its labyrinth of caramel-coloured streets feels surreal, like stumbling on to a film set long after the crew has left. Towering teal-coloured minarets, wrapped in ribbons of intricate majolica tiles, loom above, while madrassas (Islamic schools) appear on every corner alongside raised clay tombs of religious leaders. I can't help but think of the sights we flock to see in Europe: compared with Khiva's Islamic architecture, the Eiffel Tower seems like a child's Lego creation, the Trevi Fountain a jam-packed paddling pool.



WOMEN-ONLY TOURS TO TRY

TREKKING IN MOROCCO

Being in an all-women group means you can delve into Moroccan society in a different way on this four-day hike between villages in the remote M'Goun region, *below*. While there you'll meet Amazigh (Berber) families, visit an artist co-operative of female rug-weavers and watch a performance by the Houariyates, a female music band. There's four to seven hours' walking a day and accommodation is simple but clean and welcoming. **Details** Seven nights' B&B from £739pp, including most other meals (intrepidtravel.com). Fly to Marrakesh

WALKING IN THE OUTER HEBRIDES

In a group of no more than eight, this trip takes in seven different islands of the Outer Hebrides, including North and South Uist, Barra, Eriksay — the inspiration for *Whisky Galore!* — and the beautiful, uninhabited Mingulay. Expect about three hours' walking a day, plus ferries and boat trips. The holiday starts and ends in Inverness and accommodation is in pubs and guest houses. The women-only departure is April 27, 2024. **Details** Six nights' half-board from £2,195pp, including transport and some extra meals (wildernessscotland.com) **Sarah Turner**





These ultimate adventures embody the very pinnacle of travel. Perfectly curated before your 14-night ultra-luxury cruise, our Premium Land Programmes promise a seamless adventure across land and sea for the ultimate experience.




Your **3-NIGHT PREMIUM LAND PROGRAMME** includes luxury hotel or lodge stays, transfers, select meals and fascinating tours from the delightfully unique Phinda Lodge with uninterrupted mountain views and tailored safari adventures at your fingertips.

We look forward to welcoming you for a journey of a lifetime filled with personalised service, spacious accommodations and *Epicurean Perfection™*.

THE ULTIMATE LAND & SEA COLLECTION

17-NIGHT PHINDA SAFARI + CRUISE 9 - 26 JANUARY 2024

CAPE TOWN - RIO DE JANEIRO
Seven Seas Voyager® | 12 JAN 2024




Ports visited: Cape Town, Lüderitz, Walvis Bay ,
Jamestown, Rio de Janeiro 
 Overnight in port



FARES from.....£7,659pp

17-NIGHT PHINDA SAFARI + CRUISE 2 - 19 JANUARY 2025

CAPE TOWN - RIO DE JANEIRO
Seven Seas Splendor® | 5 JAN 2025

Ports visited: Cape Town, Lüderitz, Walvis Bay ,
Jamestown, Rio de Janeiro 
 Overnight in port



FARES from.....£8,309pp

THE ULTIMATE EXPERIENCE

It's all included from land to sea

Return flights and transfers | 14-night all-inclusive cruise | *Included & Unlimited* Shore Excursions during your cruise

1-night at Intercontinental or Tambo Hotel (or similar), with breakfast | 2 nights at Phinda Game Reserve (or similar), KwaZulu Natal

Afternoon tea upon arrival and between game drives | Dinner at Phinda Lodge on both evenings | Two afternoon and one early morning game drives

Transfers between ship and hotel | Regent Representative | Luggage handling



See more of the Phinda Private Game Reserve on *Amazing Hotels* on BBC 2, airing Sunday 3 September at 8pm

AVAILABILITY FOR THESE PREMIUM LAND PROGRAMMES IS LIMITED - CALL NOW 023 8082 1365
VISIT [RSSC.COM/ICONIC-EXPLORATIONS](https://rssc.com/iconic-explorations)
OR CONTACT YOUR TRAVEL ADVISOR



DialAFlight



Where you'll
always get a
bigger choice,
better value
and expert
advice

0330-100-2213



Calls
answered
LIVE in 5
seconds

Wish you were here?

5* JW Marriott Mauritius Resort on Le Morne Peninsula
Save 25% · 7 nights fr £1,829pp Inc flights

Tenerife

Save 20% at 5* Tivoli La Caleta Tenerife Resort

Perched peacefully between the sea and the mountains, providing the most wonderful backdrop. The resort has far-reaching subtropical gardens, a superb saltwater pool, freshwater pools and a Beach Club.

7 nights fr £999pp Inc flights

Thailand



Save £350 at 5* Anantara Koh Yao Yai Resort & Villas

Offering the height of tranquillity, spa-

ciousness and luxury on a lush island in the middle of Phang Nga Bay. There are lots of watersports and boat trips available and Anantara Spa promises a deeply relaxing experience.

7 nights fr £2,219pp Inc flights

Dubai



Save 45% HB at the 5* JA Palm Tree Court

Located within JA The Resort, with lush green gardens and just steps from the lovely palm lined beach, with swimming pools, spa, equestrian centre, gym, marina and renowned for its great service.

5 nights fr £1,269pp Inc flights

Orlando

Save 10% at the 4* Floridays Resort Orlando

Feel at home in a spacious fully-equipped suite nestled on 20-acres of beautifully manicured, tropical landscaped grounds. Spend hours lounging poolside while the kids play after a long day at the theme parks. Based on 4 people sharing a 2 bedroom suite.

7 nights fr £965pp Inc flights

Peru

Save £150 on this fabulous tour of Peru

Experience some of the most breathtaking sights including famous Machu Picchu, the beautiful Lost City of the Incas and the golden city of Cusco. Take a buggy ride on the dunes, go trekking

up volcanoes and even go white water rafting in the Urubamba River Valley. Explore nature in the Amazon jungle, take a boat on Lake Titicaca and see the abundance of wildlife here.

21 nights fr £3,459pp Inc flights

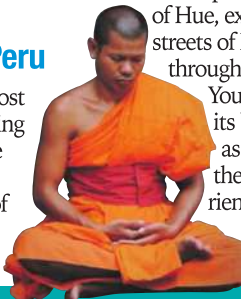
Vietnam

Save £200 FB on this amazing Vietnam tour

Discover the top sights of Vietnam with this short yet comprehensive tour, perfect for those with limited time. Experience the historic city of Hue, explore the picturesque streets of Hoi An, and cruise through the stunning Halong Bay.

You'll also visit Hanoi, with its bustling markets, as well as the serene landscapes of the Mekong Delta, and experience the delicious cuisine.

10 nights fr £2,735pp Inc flights



SEE THESE LATEST OFFERS FROM HOTELS WE KNOW AND TRUST. FLIGHTS INCLUDED.

Antigua

Save 45% AI

Choose Verandah Resort & Spa and escape to a place for fun and relaxation. Boasting world-class amenities, the island's largest free-form pool, delectable dining options and a pampering spa.

7 nights fr £2,075pp Inc flights



Barbados

Save 45% AI

The boutique 5* O2 Beach Club & Spa offers pure comfort on a powder white beach fringing the incredible turquoise waters of the sea, with gourmet dining, a cosy rooftop lounge and Acqua spa.

7 nights fr £2,125pp Inc flights



Grenada

Save 50% AI

Enjoying a great position on the exotic Pink Gin beach, the 5* Sandals Grenada Resort & Spa is an award-winning hideaway. Its premium all inclusive includes 10 dining options and watersports.

7 nights fr £2,179pp Inc flights



St Lucia

Save 15% AI

The elegant 5* Cap Maison sits in a stunningly beautiful location with its own secluded sandy beach and offers incredible dining options at The Cliff at Cap and The Naked Fisherman restaurants.

7 nights fr £5,299pp Inc flights



Maldives

Save 25%

Located in the North-Western tip of Male Atoll, is the island of Sangeli, home to 5* OBLU SELECT Sangeli, offering the discerning traveller an all-encompassing all inclusive beach break.

7 nights fr £2,285pp Inc flights



Mauritius

Save 10%

Be one of the first to be welcomed to the newly renovated Veranda Grand Baie, similar to a Creole guest house with a small yet sheltered private beach, the perfect hideaway to soak up some laid-back vibes.

7 nights fr £1,125pp Inc flights



Seychelles

Save £200

Set on one of Mahe's most beautiful beaches, the 4* Carana Beach Hotel consists of 40 luxurious chalets, all with stunning views of the turquoise ocean, white-sand beach and lush jungle.

7 nights fr £2,675pp Inc flights

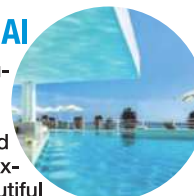


Mexico

Save £250 AI

A luxurious boutique resort, 4* OLEO Cancun Playa is steeped in minimalist luxury on the beautiful coast of Cancun, with brilliant beach access and unique services to leave guests feeling pampered throughout.

7 nights fr £1,275pp Inc flights



Rugby World Cup. Kick off the autumn with a holiday to remember

IF YOU thought the summer's sport was over. Think again.

Next week fans of an oval ball and H shaped goalposts get their turn with the start of the Rugby World Cup.

Teams will be arriving from across the world and many from our favourite destinations. So in honour of the World Cup we've put together some special offers for you.

Call our travel team today and avoid a scrum for the best holiday offers.

1 FIJI Save 20% + transfers

Outrigger Fiji Beach Resort
7 nights fr **£2,359pp** Inc flights

2 CHILE Save £250 + transfers

Glimpses of Chile Tour
9 nights fr **£3,675pp** Inc flights

3 ITALY Save 25%

Hotel Castello - Forte Village Resort
7 nights fr **£1,825pp** Inc flights



4 AUSTRALIA Save 10% + car hire

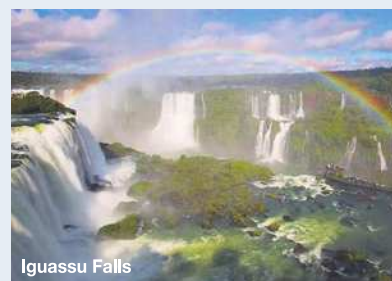
Melbourne & The Great Southern Tour
10 nights fr **£1,999pp** Inc flights

5 NAMIBIA Save 10% + transfers

Namibia Highlights Tour
8 nights fr **£2,485pp** Inc flights

6 NEW ZEALAND Save £250

North to South Explorer Fly Drive
15 nights fr **£4,175pp** Inc flights



7 ARGENTINA Save £100 + transfers

Natural Wonders of Argentina
11 nights fr **£3,279pp** Inc flights

8 PORTUGAL Save 15% + free breakfast

W Algarve
7 nights fr **£1,195pp** Inc flights

9 JAPAN Save 10% + transfers

Highlights of Japan Self Guided Tour
13 nights fr **£3,295pp** Inc flights

10 SOUTH AFRICA Save 25% + transfers

Cape Town and The Big Five
7 nights fr **£4,789pp** Inc flights

See the DialAFlight website
for these and many more offers

Flexifares - Allowing you to plan ahead with maximum flexibility



	ECONOMY	BUSINESS		ECONOMY	BUSINESS		ECONOMY	BUSINESS		ECONOMY	BUSINESS
Antigua	fr £495	fr £2599	Faro	fr £99	fr £389	Melbourne	fr £939	fr £4565	Singapore	fr £649	fr £2549
Auckland	fr £1259	fr £4989	Hong Kong	fr £639	fr £2509	Miami	fr £479	fr £2259	Sri Lanka	fr £689	fr £2465
Bali	fr £795	fr £3385	Jamaica	fr £609	fr £1995	New York	fr £399	fr £1769	St Lucia	fr £569	fr £2419
Bangkok	fr £589	fr £2349	Johannesburg	fr £529	fr £1959	Orlando	fr £429	fr £2359	Sydney	fr £1085	fr £4699
Barbados	fr £539	fr £2399	Kuala Lumpur	fr £689	fr £2099	Perth	fr £1085	fr £4395	Tenerife	fr £129	fr £509
Cancun	fr £535	fr £2195	Las Vegas	fr £579	fr £2419	Phuket	fr £749	fr £2989	Tokyo	fr £835	fr £2675
Cape Town	fr £545	fr £1799	Los Angeles	fr £469	fr £2499	Rio de Janeiro	fr £665	fr £2069	Toronto	fr £399	fr £1975
Cyprus	fr £119	fr £585	Maldives	fr £719	fr £2925	San Francisco	fr £469	fr £2355	Vancouver	fr £509	fr £2319
Dubai	fr £399	fr £1535	Mauritius	fr £579	fr £1929	Seychelles	fr £599	fr £2059	Vietnam	fr £735	fr £3245

MARATHON MAN

Extreme fundraising has led *Jordan Wylie* to clock up the miles – and the donations – in some of the world’s most hostile conditions

What do you pack for a trip that involves running in subzero temperatures? Layers and resilience mostly. Oh, and Vaseline to stop your eyelashes from freezing. It’s certainly not your average holiday.

In 2020 I set myself the challenge of completing ten marathons in ten of the coldest places on Earth, including Siberia, Antarctica and Greenland. Why do it? Running and travel have been a balm in my life, helping my mental health and giving me unforgettable experiences in some of the most remote places on the planet – and I’ve raised money along the way. My passion for marathons

began in 2018, when I ticked off three – in Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia – for the Running Dangerously project. After that I was hooked. I’ve met incredible people while running, some who have changed my life. Hopefully I’ve had a positive impact on their lives too.

Even for a soldier turned extreme adventurer, long-distance running in biting conditions is not pretty at times; there is no boutique hotel at the finishing line or a support car moving my kit.

While running in hostile weather conditions isn’t easy – put avalanches, wind chills and polar bears on your list of things to worry about – it has given me some amazing travel experiences. Here are my highlights from each trip:

FROM RUSSIA WITH GLOVES
Omsk, Siberia
The Siberian Ice Race coincided with the Russian Orthodox Christmas, so everywhere was closed. It was minus 13C, and in a bid to up the fundraising ante I was running dressed as Kristoff from Disney’s *Frozen*.

A half-marathon road race in the city of Omsk, which lies on the Irtysh River, this run offered plenty of snow-dusted sights to distract, including opulent Orthodox architecture and soaring fairytale forests. We were welcomed warmly by the locals too, who seemed to embrace the ridiculousness of running miles in minus temperatures.



Jordan Wylie celebrates completing the Antarctic Ice Marathon



T **TIMES** Travel Offers

TOUR OF Vietnam and Cambodia

Departures | September 2023 to November 2024

16 NIGHTS FROM

£4,090*

per person

Price Includes

- Return flights from the UK, current taxes
- Domestic transportation
- 16 breakfasts, 15 lunches and 16 dinners
- 16 nights' four-star accommodation
- Touring with guides and entrance fees as detailed in itinerary
- Visa fees for UK and EU passport holders


This tour blends the best of Cambodia with Vietnam. Head to Siem Reap to explore the temple complex of Angkor before passing through Cambodia’s charming capital, Phnom Penh, and into Vietnam


This tour is the perfect introduction to Vietnam, with cultural activities and plenty of opportunities to interact with the locals. Learn more about the Vietnam War in and around Saigon, and explore Hue for a glimpse of a magnificent imperial past. Hoi An will charm you with its cobble streets and scenic riverside setting, whilst capital city Hanoi boasts timeless streets full of local life, charming colonial architecture and a fascinating history to discover. The tour finishes as it started, with a showstopper

– Halong Bay, where you’ll take an overnight cruise out onto the calm waters and wend your way through the breathtaking karst scenery.

When booking this tour with The Times Travel Offers, you will get an exclusive complimentary pre-tour extension including an extra hotel night with breakfast and dinner as well as a half-day immersive cooking class - make sure to quote TIMES-ON when booking.

Our Trusted Partner

 **Wendy Wu Tours**



Scan the QR code with your camera app to view more details.





CALL TODAY ON

0808 258 3467

thetimes.co.uk/ww-vietnam

QUOTE TIMES-ON

*Prices listed are based on two sharing a twin/double room. Single supplement on request. Quote TIMES-ON when booking for the extension offer. Flights on holidays booked more than 11 months in advance may be subject to supplements when airline fares are published. The offer is subject to availability and Wendy Wu Tours reserve the right to change or withdraw the offer. Operated by and subject to the booking conditions of Wendy Wu, ABTA W7994 ATOL 6639, a company wholly independent of News UK.





MARK CONLON/ANTARCTIC ICE MARATHON

COOL RUNNINGS IN CANADA

Yukon, Canada
One of the toughest runs was the Montane Yukon Marathon in the icy wilderness of Canada's northwest. The mercury plummeted to minus 40C but the wind chill meant it felt like minus 55C, with the threat of frostbite and hypothermia.

We ran through the town of Whitehorse. Its 25,000 residents are a hardy bunch – and outnumbered three to one by moose. As I put one foot in front of the other I watched local children fish for wild salmon without coats on. After-race activities? The nearby Yukon Wildlife Preserve is home to Arctic foxes and Canadian lynx. Despite the below-zero climate, Whitehorse sits on a network of hot springs, perfect for slow-poaching after the challenge of your life.

LUNAR RACE

Jokulsarlon, Iceland
I ran this marathon in March, one of the wettest months in Iceland, and was expecting driving rain to be the biggest challenge. The wind had other ideas. The gusts were so strong, the boot was ripped off my videographer's car.

The upside to an Icelandic marathon? The glacial lake scenery at Jokulsarlon in the country's southeast was spectacular – lunar in springtime. Black, volcanic rock pierces the bright white snow that's still on the ground. After my marathon I headed to Diamond Beach, where huge chunks of glacial ice decorate the shoreline like precious jewels. Marathon Tours plot routes for runners through some of the country's most mesmerising scenery (marathontours.com).

GREENLAND GLOW

Nuuk, Greenland
A favourite. Conditions were cold but not too cold, with plenty of sights to keep me motivated. Greenlanders love a marathon, and there are plenty to choose from. If I go back I may try the midnight marathon, which takes place in summer, and the runners pass the Unesco-listed Ilulissat Icefjord.

While I was there I was treated to a steaming bowl of suaasat, a soup made with onions, potatoes and seal meat. Traditional life still thrives in these communities, and post-race I had a go at husky-sledding. Hurling through this snow-cloaked

landscape with the cold wind lashing your skin is certainly one way to experience Greenland's rugged beauty.

FINLAND FREEZE

Finnish Lapland
Like Greenland, this marathon was slightly easier than the others – still subzero, but with less extreme temperatures: just minus 10C to minus 15C. Finnish Lapland was a visual feast too. After clocking up the miles I stared in awe at the northern lights, an incredible sight. And helping me on my way during the run was a panorama of frozen lakes and forests that looked as though they'd been coated in icing sugar. It's a beautiful backdrop for a marathon, and for a holiday.

Snowboarding and skiing are popular here too, and I'd be tempted back for the more challenging slopes – and those Narnian views.

HIGH AND DRY IN ANTARCTICA

Antarctica
The first challenge is getting there. The conditions have to be right, and I spent ten days waiting for a weather window to get to Antarctica's Union Glacier Camp. I was recovering from a ruptured

Achilles, so this marathon was seven hours of pure pain. Financial pain too – it costs an arm and a leg to pull this trip off.

It's worth the effort though. Sleeping in tents at Union Glacier Camp is an experience you'll never forget. The air is so clean, it feels sharp in your lungs as you inhale. And Punta Arenas, the largest city in Chile's southernmost region and the departure point for those heading to Antarctica, is filled with an adventurous spirit. Crammed with shops to fill an explorer's backpack, it's where famous adventurers have rested before expeditions – a tippie in the speakeasy vibes of the Shackleton Bar is a must.

MONGOLIA SOLO

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
My trip to one of the world's coldest capitals was a solo one. I didn't have accommodation booked, which gave me other things to ponder rather than just a subzero marathon.

The city of Ulaanbaatar was a complete surprise – industrialised, jam-packed with traffic, noise and subcultures that scream modern life, with Soviet and Chinese influences in the mix.

I was invited to try khuushuur – a sort of Mongolian Cornish pasty. Filled with mutton or goat meat, they serve as a nice handwarmer in the cold winter months.

POLARISING EXPERIENCE

Svalbard, Arctic Ocean
Your biggest worry as a runner in the Norwegian Arctic archipelago of Svalbard is polar bears. You can't really do a marathon here without hiring a guide, armed with a gun to ward off the bears. The Svalbard marathon was special for many reasons, though. At the start line I bumped into Truls Oma, whom I'd met six years earlier during my Afghanistan marathon. It felt like a full-circle moment.

I discussed climate change with a local during this trip, and she told me bluntly: "If you actually cared about the environment you wouldn't be in Svalbard right now." I left feeling uneasy about my carbon footprint, vowing to travel more consciously.

For more information on Jordan Wylie and his fundraising efforts, see jordanwylie.org
Running holidays for the rest of us on page 25 →

WHERE YOU CAN DO IT ALL...

Sandals
SALE
NOW ON

...OR NOTHING AT ALL

VOTED THE WORLD'S LEADING ALL-INCLUSIVE RESORTS

SAVE £100 PER BOOKING
ON 7-9 NIGHT STAYS

SAVE £150 PER BOOKING
ON 10+ NIGHT STAYS

ENJOY FANTASTIC SAVINGS OFF YOUR NEXT ALL-INCLUSIVE HOLIDAY

BARBADOS

SANDALS BARBADOS

- Staying in a Caribbean Grand Luxe
- Travel in **June 2024**
- Includes Return Flights in Virgin Atlantic's Premium cabin

7 nights all-inclusive from
£2,485PP

SAINT LUCIA

SANDALS HALCYON BEACH

- Staying in a Crystal Lagoon Poolside Luxury
- Travel in **September 2023**
- Includes Return Flights in British Airways' World Traveller Plus cabin

7 nights all-inclusive from
£2,539PP

JAMAICA

SANDALS ROYAL PLANTATION

- Staying in a Viceroy Honeymoon Oceanfront Butler Suite
- Travel in **September 2023**
- Includes Return Flights in British Airways' World Traveller Plus cabin

7 nights all-inclusive from
£2,619PP

CURAÇAO

SANDALS ROYAL CURAÇAO

- Staying in a Subi Premium
- Travel in **June 2024**
- Includes Return Flights in KLM's Premium Comfort cabin

7 nights all-inclusive from
£3,645PP

0800 022 3443 | sandals.co.uk



100% FINANCIAL PROTECTION
ON FLIGHT-INCLUSIVE PACKAGE HOLIDAYS

Use promo code AUTUMN100 to apply an additional £100 saving off new 7-9 night bookings or promo code AUTUMN150 to apply an additional £150 saving off new 10+ night bookings. Valid for bookings made between 30 August – 03 October '23 when travelling between 30 August '23 – 30 June '26. Please note: Promo code AUTUMN100 or AUTUMN150 cannot be used in conjunction with any other promo code at the time of booking. Savings of up to 45% plus an extra 5% plus up to an additional £900 applicable to the accommodation portion of a Sandals booking for travel up to Dec '26 (please note: holidays can only be confirmed up to 3 years in advance). Discounts vary depending on resort, room category, travel date and duration booked. Minimum stay requirements may apply. Book by 03 Oct '23. Prices are per person, based on 2 adults sharing a room on an all-inclusive basis and include return economy flights (unless otherwise stated) and all applicable savings. Prices are correct at time of submission/distribution, are subject to availability and can change or be withdrawn without notice. For more information visit www.sandals.co.uk/specials/uk-offers. Unique Caribbean Holidays Ltd, registered office 2nd Floor Nucleus House, 2 Lower Mortlake Road, Richmond, England, TW9 2JA, acts as an agent for Sandals and Beaches Resorts Intl. All holidays are ABTA (Y6413) and ATOL (11174) protected.



Times
readers save
£100pp with the
code **TIMES100**
on any Exodus
trip^

16 DAYS FROM
£4,649*
per person

Discover Costa Rica

WITH DOMINICAL

 **Departures | November 2023 to December 2024**

Experience the rainforest, mountains and coast of this tropical paradise

Costa Rica is renowned for having proportionately more protected land than any other country, making it ripe for wildlife tourism. What is less known is the marvellous, often bizarre, variety of animals from catatonic sloths, screaming howler monkeys, screeching toucans and nesting green turtles. Throw in the Caribbean and Pacific coastlines and it is easy to see why so many return.

This itinerary differs from Discover Costa Rica, spending two nights at Dominical instead of Piedras Blancas. This option is a great alternative as this area has much to offer: beautiful beaches with great sunset views, waterfalls and natural swimming holes, and the chance to explore nearby Marino Ballena National Park.

Our Trusted Partner



What We Love

With the opportunity to experience the very best beaches and rainforests of Costa Rica, you'll get to fully immerse yourself in this beautiful country, whilst getting to view the most incredible wildlife in its natural habitat.



Scan the QR code with your camera app to view more details.

- Price Includes**
-  Flights Included
 -  All transport and listed activities. Arrival and departure transfers
 -  All accommodation. 14 nights in comfortable hotels and ecolodges
 -  All breakfasts, eight lunches, six dinners
 -  Tour leader throughout
 -  Green turtle nesting season: July to October



CALL TODAY ON
0808 239 4959
thetimes.co.uk/
discovercostarica
QUOTE TIMES100^

*Prices correct at time of going to press. Prices listed are based on two sharing a twin/double room. Single supplement on request. Additional dates may be available, please call for details. Offer subject to availability and prices may fluctuate. Prices are correct at time of publication, and subject to confirmation at time of booking. ^Save £100pp when booking through Times Travel - quote TIMES100 at time of booking, included in the price above. This offer is not combinable with any other offers, including Loyalty Discounts. Operated by and subject to the booking conditions of Exodus Travels, ABTA Y0751, ATOL 25825, a company wholly independent of News UK.



Travel SOLO ADVENTURE SPECIAL

→ Continued from page 23

RUNNING HOLIDAYS FOR THE REST OF US

Arctic tundra not really your scene? From Californian marathons to good deeds in Morocco, *Richard Mellor* picks seven alternatives

FOLLOW HADRIAN'S WALL

Almost two millennia after Hadrian had his wall erected, it's possible to spend a week jogging along its many surviving sections. Available as a private trip, this itinerary takes you west from Wallsend in Tyne and Wear to Bowness-on-Solway on Cumbria's coast. You'll average 14 miles a day, including plenty of hills, but the chance to pause at tearooms, viewpoints and ancient forts ought to provide encouragement ahead of nights at inns or guesthouses. Dog-friendly itineraries are available too. **Details** Seven nights' B&B from £720pp, including transport and luggage transfers (contoursrun.co.uk)

SKYRUNNING IN THE ITALIAN DOLOMITES

Popular in the Dolomites, "skyrunning" involves snowy or rocky trails with steep gradients at an altitude of more than 2,000m. You can sample it at Hotel Sassongher, an upmarket, chalet-style base in the Alta Badia resort area near Corvara (act quickly for this year — it closes for seven weeks from September 17). The hotel's expert takes guests out jogging along suitably challenging paths; you can recover at the Sky Spa in a heated rooftop whirlpool before dinner. **Details** Half-board doubles from £233 (sassongher.it)

HELP YOUNG MOROCCAN WOMEN

This female-only, small-group trip to Morocco includes overnight trekking and daytime trail runs in the High Atlas mountains. But it will also have its participants skill-sharing courtesy of a local

organisation whose purpose-built boarding houses help Berber girls from rural communities to continue their education beyond primary school. You'll meet some of the students and provide some interview or empowerment tips. You'll also stay in the majestic Kasbah du Toubkal and have two days to experience Marrakesh. **Details** Seven nights' B&B from £1,750pp, including transport, activities and some extra meals; departs on November 13 (orbis-expeditions.com). Fly to Marrakesh

CALIFORNIA PACING

Next taking place on April 28, 2024 and open for registrations, the Big Sur International Marathon follows a temporarily traffic-free section of California's famously scenic Pacific Coast Highway (aka Highway 1) between Big Sur and Carmel. Its numerous hills — the total elevation gain is 665m — are offset by redwood forests, glorious seascapes and McWay Falls. You'll be encouraged along by a grand piano player on Bixby Bridge (£237pp; bigsurmarathon.org). Close to Big Sur River, some of the cabins at nearby Fernwood Resort have bathtubs to soothe limbs. **Details** Two nights' self-catering for six from £559 (fernwoodbigsur.com). Fly to San Francisco

THE BEST OF BALI

With your base in Ubud at Villa Bumi Artura, this private running retreat combines

guided jogs with jaw-dropping scenery. After sunrise yoga and meditation sessions, days involve runs around the central crater of Mount Batur, through jungle-green rice terraces, beside sandy coves, alongside waterfalls and past temple complexes. Nutritious food will help you power through an average daily distance of seven miles. It's next available in November, when the average temperature is 27C. **Details** Five nights' full board from £1,735pp, including transport and activities (soulstrandtrail.com). Fly to Denpasar

RUN WITH A MASAI WARRIOR

It isn't cheap but this trip offers you the chance to run with a red-robed warrior from east Africa's Masai people, who are famed for their incredible fitness and endurance. Your terrain will be the acacia forest, salt pans and savannah of Chem Chem, a private reserve in northern Tanzania. While most animals will hear you coming and steer clear, you may see zebras or giraffes. The tailor-made itinerary also features private game drives in the wildlife-rich Serengeti and Ngorongoro Crater. **Details** Eight nights' full board from £9,350pp, including flights, transfers and activities (originaltravel.co.uk)

AUTUMN WEEKEND IN WALES

Fell running, morning yoga sessions and history converge on this group taster weekend in Wales's rugged Black Mountains. Having first cantered up to the 811m summit of Waun Fach and descended via the Dragon's Back ridge, you'll then spend Saturday following a narrow valley down to Offa's Dyke before arriving in Hay-on-Wye. Anyone capable of running ten miles a day is welcome. Choose between a shared bunkhouse next to the high-altitude Dinas Castle Inn, which is overlooked by its namesake ruined fort, and a private bedroom inside. **Details** Two nights' B&B from £250pp, including activities; departs on November 10 (wildrunning.co.uk)



Hadrian's Wall, top. A Masai warrior in Tanzania, above right. Bixby Bridge in California, right

CRAIG LOVELL/ALAMY; JOE SOHM/GETTY IMAGES

Amazing Australia

Choose from **thousands of luxury hotels** on our website

Calls answered LIVE in 5 seconds

Pure luxury in South Australia 5*

Save 10% + car hire



Ultimate luxury and a great adventure awaits with this fantastic self drive trip which includes a stay in **Adelaide** plus 2 luxury lodges. You'll get to see some of the best southern Australia has to offer including **Barossa** and **Flinders Ranges**.

9 nights fr £4,365pp Inc flights

Spectacular Queensland fly drive 4*

Save 10%



Visit the tropical town of **Cairns**, soak up sophistication on **Noosa's Hastings Street**, watch whales from **Hervey Bay**, explore the endless beaches of **K'gari** (Fraser Island), dive the **Great Barrier Reef** and finish in the vibrant city of **Brisbane**.

13 nights fr £3,075pp Inc flights

Sydney, Uluru & Reef 4*

Save 10% + transfers



This great triple-centre tour starts at **The Vibe Hotel** on **Sydney's** harbourfront. From here fly to stunning **Uluru** (Ayers Rock) and stay in the **Desert Gardens Hotel** for 2 nights. Finally, fly to the **Great Barrier Reef** for 7 nights at the **Hamilton Island Reef Hotel**.

12 nights fr £3,395pp Inc flights

Great Ocean Road fly drive 4*

Save 10% + transfers



Embark on this epic trip from **Melbourne** to **Adelaide**, via the **Great Ocean Road** ending at **Kangaroo Island**. See the beauty of **Erskine Falls**, the **Shipwreck Coast**, the iconic **Twelve Apostles**, **Grampians NP**, then cruise to **Kangaroo Island**.

10 nights fr £2,559pp Inc flights

Perth & South West highlights fly drive

2 free nights + car hire



Begin in **Perth**, drive through **Margaret River** and **Albany**, and along the way you will see pretty towns, national parks, magnificent forests, a stunning coast with great surfing beaches, vineyards, and you will never be far from the ocean.

13 nights fr £2,299pp Inc flights

DialAFlight

0330-100-2213

CLIENT TRUST ACCOUNT ATOL Protected ABTA ABTA No 76705

THE No.1 TRAVEL COMPANY

★★★★★ Trustpilot 12,073 reviews

QUEEN MARY 2'S Literature Festival at Sea 2024

 **Departure | November 13, 2024**

**2023 departure
still available,
please enquire**



Queen Mary 2's Literature Festival at Sea brings together authors, journalists and critics for a week-long celebration of the written word

Find yourself in literary heaven, surrounded by authors, poets, journalists, historians, and fellow book lovers, on this seven-night sailing, dedicated to the power of the pen.

Curated by the programming team of Cheltenham Festivals, this unique voyage celebrates the written word in its many forms.

Sailing aboard Queen Mary 2 is the ultimate way to cross the Atlantic. You'll find an incredible sense of freedom from the space she offers. Whether you're in the mood for complete relaxation or something more active, you can find it. Immerse yourself in enthralling entertainment, be indulged in the on board spa, or simply relax with a book in her vast library.

Enjoy a daily dose of news from Times journalists. Lose yourself in thought-provoking conversation at Q&A sessions.

Meet your favourite writers at intimate book signings. Listen as literary greats dissect everything from art and film to history and politics. You could fill every day on board with all kinds of literature-based activities and experiences. And that's on top of exploring the range of signature experiences you can already look forward to when you holiday with Cunard.

Discover a line-up that includes acclaimed crime writer Mark Billingham, Scottish novelist Chris Brookmyre and his co-writer and wife, Marisa Haetzman, former US ambassador to the UK Matthew Barzun, and Sunday Times journalist Decca Aitkenhead, with more authors to be announced. The Literature Festival at Sea is a must for book lovers and free thinkers everywhere.

For all Times readers, quote TIMES while booking^ to enjoy exclusive access to

additional events with your favourite writers, experts and journalists.

PRICE INCLUDES

- ✓ Seven-night Transatlantic Crossing aboard Cunard's Queen Mary 2 from Southampton to New York
- ✓ Economy-class flights and transfers from New York to the UK
- ✓ All meals and entertainment*
- ✓ Programme of literary events throughout the voyage
- ✓ Complimentary money to spend on board**
- ✓ Access to additional events when you book direct with Cunard and quote TIMES^

OUR TRUSTED PARTNERS



Scan the QR code with your camera app to view more details.

Confirmed Speakers

FULL CURRENT LIST AVAILABLE ONLINE



Chris Brookmyre

Chris Brookmyre is the author of twenty-seven crime and SF novels, including *Black Widow*, which won the 2016 McIlvanney Prize for Scottish Crime Novel of the Year and was named the 2017 Theakstons Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year.



Decca Aitkenhead

As Chief Interviewer for the *Sunday Times*, Decca interviews leading figures in public life across the world, from politics to the arts, entertainment to science, literature to sport. She is the interviewer A-listers most fear - and most want to talk to.



Mark Billingham

Mark Billingham is one of the UK's most acclaimed and popular crime writers. His series of novels featuring DI Tom Thorne has twice won him the Crime Novel of the Year Award.



Tracy Borman

Tracy Borman is Joint Chief Curator of Historic Royal Palaces and Chief Executive of the Heritage Education Trust. Tracy is the author of a number of highly acclaimed books including *Crown & Sceptre*, *Henry VIII and the Men Who Made Him*.



Matthew Barzun

Matthew Barzun has always been fascinated about how we can stand out and fit in at the same time. He helped countries do both when he served as US Ambassador to the United Kingdom and to Sweden.



Marisa Haetzman

Marisa Haetzman collaborated with Chris Brookmyre, under the pseudonym Ambrose Parry, to write crime fiction set in the world of Nineteenth Century Edinburgh medicine.



Mike Gayle

Mike Gayle has written for a variety of publications including *The Sunday Times*, *The Guardian* and *Cosmopolitan*. Mike became a full-time novelist in 1997 following the publication of his *Sunday Times* top ten bestseller *My Legendary Girlfriend*.



Denise Mina

Denise Mina is the author of the Garnethill trilogy, the Paddy Meehan series and the Alex Morrow series. She has won the Theakston Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year Award twice and was inducted into the Crime Writers' Association Hall of Fame in 2014.



Patrick Gale

In addition to his latest, *Mother's Boy*, his seventeen novels include *Take Nothing With You* (2018), which was his fourth *Sunday Times* bestseller, *Rough Music* (2000), *Notes From an Exhibition* (2007), *A Perfectly Good Man* (2012) and *A Place Called Winter* (2015).

SEVEN NIGHTS FROM

INSIDE: £1,274 PP

BALCONY: £1,769 PP

PRINCESS GRILL SUITE: £3,299 PP



CALL TODAY ON

0808 304 2728

thetimes.co.uk/litfest2024

QUOTE TIMES

Wonders of China

 Departures | October 2023 to November 2024

This all-encompassing 17-day tour of China blends must-see sights with spectacular natural scenery and cultural encounters.

Starting in the bustling capital, Beijing, explore the magnificent Forbidden City and harmonious Temple of Heaven, before a trip to the iconic Great Wall. You'll discover the ancient city walls of Xian and come face-to-face with the enigmatic ranks of life-sized Terracotta Warriors which have been shrouded in mystery since their discovery in the 1970s.

Next up is a four-night cruise on the Yangtze River, stopping at many highlights along the way. Witness the world's largest hydroelectric dam, the Three Gorges, and sail peacefully along the Shennong Stream soaking up the dramatic scenery as you pass riverside villages and forest-covered mountains.

No trip to mainland China is complete without seeing their most adorable residents; the giant pandas. Visit Chongqing Zoo's Panda House for a closer look at these playful bears before

boarding a high-speed bullet train to the stunning city of Guilin - one of China's most picturesque regions.

Wind between the dramatic limestone karsts of the Li River with a trip to the lush emerald-green countryside of Yangshuo, and return to Guilin to visit the famous Sun and Moon Pagodas of Ronghu Lake and the colourful Reed Flute Caves.

The trip ends amongst the towering skyscrapers of Shanghai - a city where the old and new sit harmoniously side by side. See the city's contrasting skyline with an evening cruise along the Huangpu River, find serenity at the peaceful Yu Gardens and explore the magnificent architecture along The Bund.

When booking this tour with The Times Expert Traveller, you will get an exclusive complimentary pre-tour extension including an extra hotel night with

breakfast and dinner included as well as a dumpling making class - make sure to quote TIMES-ON when booking.

Our Trusted Partner

 **Wendy Wu Tours**



What We Love

China is a land of many wonders - ancient and modern, natural and man-made. This hugely popular tour is a comprehensive journey through China's most iconic sights from the magnificent Great Wall to the mighty Yangtze River.



Scan the QR code with your camera app to view more details.



Departures Itinerary

Beijing • Xi'an • Yangtze River Cruise
• Guilin • Yangshuo • Shanghai



Price Includes



International flights and current taxes



Domestic transportation



All Meals



All four-star accommodation



Touring with guides and entrance fees



Exclusive free pre-tour extension including hotel night, dinner and dumpling making class - quote TIMES-ON when booking



CALL TODAY ON
0808 239 2639
thetimes.co.uk/ww-china
QUOTE TIMES-ON^

NOBLE CALEDONIA



SOUTH AFRICA & NAMIBIA BY PRIVATE TRAIN

A journey from Pretoria to Swakopmund aboard the luxurious Rovos Rail Private Train
30th April to 15th May 2024 & 27th April to 12th May 2025



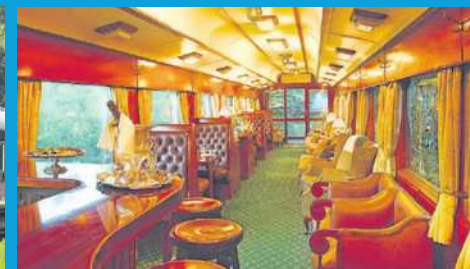
Join us aboard the luxurious Rovos Rail private train which we have chartered for this captivating journey and travel from the savannahs of the Highveld to the Atlantic Ocean in the west. The majesty of the landscapes we travel through cast a lifelong spell on all who visit.

We depart from Pretoria bound for Kimberley, the location of one of the world's most famous diamond rushes and where we will visit the Big Hole. The railway line then traverses the stark vistas of the arid Northern Cape into Namibia where our train winds its way through stunning vistas to the desert and mountainous landscapes, with stops along the way to view some remarkable scenery, diverse wildlife and colonial cities. One of the numerous highlights will be a visit to the Fish River Canyon, second in size to the Grand Canyon and a truly spectacular sight. However, for many, the ultimate highlight will be the sand dunes at Sossusvlei for which Namibia is so renowned. Arriving into Sossusvlei by private flight we enjoy a night's stay with desert drives and a bush dinner before flying to Windhoek to rejoin the train and continue overnight to Otjiwarongo. Here we visit the Cheetah Conservation Fund before continuing to the game-rich Etosha National Park where we enjoy an overnight lodge stay and some game drives. Our journey continues on to Swakopmund, a perfectly preserved 19th century German Hansa town set between the dunes of the Namib Desert and the roaring Atlantic Ocean; an unforgettable end to a remarkable journey.



ROVOS RAIL PRIVATE TRAIN

is a luxurious private train which we have chartered for these exclusive journeys. Step aboard the wood-panelled coaches and enjoy fine cuisine in five-star luxury as some of the most varied scenery imaginable unfolds beyond the windows. The train carries a maximum of 72 passengers in 36 superbly appointed suites and the sleeper coaches are some of the most spacious in the world, offering every modern convenience and comfort. The air-conditioned suites accommodate two people offering the option of twin or spacious double beds. On board there is an Observation Car at the rear of the train with enlarged windows and open-air balcony. At the centre of the train there is a Lounge Car, which also houses the Gift Shop. The Pride of Africa has two 42-seater Dining Cars to accommodate the maximum complement of passengers in total comfort at one sitting. An enthusiastic team of chefs are responsible for overseeing the very important task of ensuring guests' every need is catered for.



For full details on this holiday call us today on **020 7752 0000** for your copy of our brochure.



THE ITINERARY IN BRIEF

Day 1 London to Johannesburg, South Africa. Fly by scheduled flight.

Day 2 Pretoria. Arrive into Johannesburg and transfer to our hotel in Pretoria for an overnight stay. This afternoon we will walk to the Union Buildings designed by the famous colonial English architect, Sir Herbert Baker. Completed in 1913, it now houses the offices of the President and Ministers. We return to the hotel and enjoy a welcome dinner this evening. (D)

Day 3 Board Rovos Rail in Pretoria. After breakfast we transfer to the Rovos Rail station at Capital Park in Pretoria which, once a bustling hub of steam locomotion in the old Transvaal is now the headquarters for Rovos Rail. We will have the opportunity to tour this gracious, colonial-style railway station and the ever-expanding railway museum. The eyes of rail enthusiasts will be drawn to the vast carriage and locomotive sheds where teams of dedicated personnel keep the rolling stock in perfect order. We board our train in the late morning and travel south across the goldfields of the Witwaterstrand. (B, L, D)

Day 4 Kimberley. This morning we will reach the historical train station of Kimberley, the city of diamonds. At the end of the 19th century, the town experienced a real diamond rush, from which the diamond empire of De Beers emerged. On arrival, view the famous Big Hole, once the largest diamond mine in the world and visit the lovingly restored original buildings of Kimberley's Belle Epoque. After lunch on the train we spend the afternoon crossing the Karoo, a vast semi-desert region that was once an inland sea. (B, L, D)

Day 5 Upington. We arrive into Upington, which the railway reaches by means of a bridge 1067 metres long, the second longest bridge in South Africa. Sir Thomas Upington, attorney general of the Cape, was the man principally responsible for liquidating the business activities of the Orange River pirates and capturing their leader, Klaas Lucas. When the desperadoes were finally chased away in 1884, the town was founded on the banks of the Orange River and named in his honour. After a walking tour of the city we will join a sundowner cruise on the Orange River. (B, L, D)

Day 6 Fish River Canyon, Namibia. Over lunch we arrive in Holoog for our visit to the Fish River Canyon, second only to the Grand Canyon in Arizona in geological importance. Eroded over many millennia, the canyon is the second largest natural gorge in Africa, 161 kilometres long, 549 metres deep and, in some places, 27 kilometres wide. Baboon, rock dassie, ground squirrel and klipspringer are often seen in the canyon, while the presence of leopard and mountain zebra is indicated by tracks left at waterholes. Enjoy the stunning views and the opportunity to take a

short walk along the canyon's edge. We return to the train and depart for Aus. (B, L, D)

Day 7 Kolmanskop & Luderitz. Today's tour begins with a bus ride to the ghost town of Kolmanskop, where the first diamonds were found in Namibia in 1908. Sparking a "diamond rush" the town grew in the ensuing years, peaking in the 1920s, until the discovery of richer deposits further south. By the 1960s the population had left and the town is now at the mercy of the weather and encroaching sand dunes. Continue to the harbour town of Luderitz which was first landed by Portuguese mariners in the 15th century but it was not until 1883 when the land was bought by a wealthy merchant, Adolf Luderitz, that the town developed as part of German colonization of the region. A walk will see the Luderitz Museum and the colonial buildings including the Goerke Haus and Felsenkirche. (B, L, D)

Day 8 Keetmanshoop & Quiver Tree Forest. Visit Garas Park where we will see the unique quiver trees and the interesting rock formations. The quiver tree is not really a tree, rather a plant of the genus aloe, as evident from its scientific name, and one of the few species of aloe that reaches tree proportions, it can grow seven to nine metres high. Return to the train and depart for Mariental. (B, L, D)

Day 9 Sossusvlei. After breakfast we transfer to the airstrip for our specially chartered flights to the Namib-Naukluft Park. We will check into our overnight lodge and enjoy lunch before taking an afternoon drive in the desert. The dunes of the Namib Desert were created by sand carried by the wind from the coast of Namibia. The sand here is five million years old and is red in colour due to its iron-oxide content. The wind in the Sossusvlei area blows from all directions which means that the type of the dunes here are known as "star dunes". A special dinner will be served in the desert before we return to our lodge for an overnight stay. (B, L, D)

Day 10 Sossusvlei & Windhoek. Awake at dawn and take an early morning drive into the desert enjoying breakfast in the vlei. Later this morning we return to the airstrip for our specially chartered flights to Windhoek where the train has travelled to meet us. Situated in Namibia's central highlands, Windhoek is an attractive city surrounded by clusters of hills and the impressive Auas and Eros Mountains. We will enjoy a city tour which will include a visit to the TransNamib Transport Museum. (B, L, D)

Day 11 Cheetah Conservation Fund, Otiwarongo. Arriving at lunchtime in Kranzberg we will drive to Otiwarongo and the Cheetah Conservation Fund. Founded in 1990, the fund is dedicated to saving cheetah in the wild. The centre is a hub for conservation programming and education working with farmers, researchers and students to attain their goal. (B, L, D)

Day 12 Etosha National Park. After breakfast we transfer to the Etosha National Park for an overnight stay in a lodge. The park offers excellent game viewing in one of Africa's most accessible venues. Zebra and springbok are scattered across the endless horizon while the many waterholes attract endangered black rhino, lion, elephant and large numbers of antelope. The Etosha Pan, an extremely flat salt pan, lies at the heart of the National Park. It is the largest salt pan in Africa and with herds of wild animals passing through is an unforgettable experience. We take an afternoon game drive and return to our lodge for dinner and an overnight stay. (B, L, D)

Day 13 Etosha National Park & Namib Desert. An early morning game drive provides another opportunity to observe wild animals close up. In the late morning we return to our train and spend the afternoon heading southwest across the Namib Desert towards the Atlantic Ocean. (B, L, D)

Day 14 Walvis Bay & Swakopmund. We arrive at Walvis Bay and bid our train farewell as we transfer to our Swakopmund hotel for an overnight stay. Swakopmund, Namibia's seaside resort on the west coast, is a place of singular charm. It resembles a small Bavarian village nestling between the desert and the sea and enjoys a restful and relaxing atmosphere. Enjoy an afternoon at leisure and meet this evening for our farewell dinner. (B, D)

Day 15 Swakopmund to London. After breakfast we will transfer to Walvis Bay for our scheduled indirect flight to London. (B)

Day 16 London. Arrive today.

PRICES & INCLUSIONS

Prices per person based on double occupancy start from **£8995** for a Pullman Suite.

WHAT'S INCLUDED:

Economy class scheduled air travel • Nine nights aboard Rovos Rail • Overnight accommodation in Pretoria, Sossusvlei, Etosha National Park & Swakopmund • Meals as indicated (B - Breakfast, L - Lunch, D - Dinner) • House beer, wine & soft drinks with included meals • All drinks on the Rovos Rail (excluding premium brands) • Limited laundry service on Rovos Rail • Excursions • Onboard Train Manager • Noble Caledonia Tour Manager • Local guides • Gratuities • Transfers • Airport taxes.

NB. Itinerary subject to change. Travel insurance is not included in the price. Our current booking conditions apply to all reservations.

Best of Travel

Whether you'd like to escape to the other side of the world, or venture somewhere closer to home, these travel ideas and tips are sure to fire up the imagination

Read more online! Visit thebestofliving.com and follow [f](#) [t](#) [@](#) [@abestofliving](#)



Realign your body and mind

BodyHoliday provides a personalised wellness and discovery experience where you can enjoy a transformational journey designed as an antidote to the pressures of modern-day life.

Located on a pristine crescent beach surrounded by lush tropical gardens, the resort combines the pleasures of an active beach vacation with a nearly endless array of activities and body treatments, including opportunities to explore, discover and gain insights that last a lifetime.

Time spent at the resort is designed to make you feel renewed, invigorated and completely comfortable in your



skin. That's why their all-inclusive wellness resort strives to incorporate every imaginable fitness practice or sport on land and sea.

The experience also includes a daily spa treatment every full day of your stay and a plethora of options in restorative and rejuvenating classes. Perched at an elevated level and overlooking the property, the resort's Wellness Centre is a nurturing setting of peace and tranquillity.

It's home to Pavitra, the only genuine Ayurvedic temple in Saint Lucia, along with a state-of-the-art fitness centre, spa rooms, dance studio and thalassotherapy pool. A stay with them includes everything you could desire and nothing that distracts from the promise they make to their guests. Give them your body for a week, and they'll give you back your mind.

bodyholiday
Saint Lucia

Call 020 3096 1605, email reservations@thebodyholiday.com or visit thebodyholiday.com to learn more.

Pattard, a North Devon hidden gem

Pattard is located near Hartland in the North Devon Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It consists of three holiday cottages that sleep between two and eight people with a fine dining restaurant on site. Each cottage is well equipped with central heating and free Wi-Fi. There are plenty of walks nearby, including the South West Coast Path. There are three pubs and general stores in Hartland, just half a mile away.

Book your stay at pattard.co.uk or call 01237 441311.



Live your best life high in the sky

Located 210m above sea level, AURA SKYPOOL is one of the most renowned attractions of Dubai, offering the only 360-degree view of all the iconic landmarks.

Guests can experience AURA at sunrise, daytime, sunset and nighttime as well as yoga classes. Morning experiences are more wellness orientated, with massages available at their daybeds, while afternoon and night experiences are more vibrant, with DJs, live performances and entertainment.

Guests are transported to the 50th floor of Palm Tower where they are met with a tropical island in the sky. Lush greenery and natural design elements together with high-end interior finishes create an elegant oasis fuelled by a socially vibrant atmosphere.

The unique 360-degree infinity pool is where the AURA experience truly comes to life. Chic, yet comfortable loungers and oversized sunbeds offer the perfect place to relax, while the unobstructed panoramic views of Dubai make guests feel like they are on top of the world.



AURA
SKYPOOL LOUNGE

Follow [@auraskypool.dubai](#), visit auraskypool.com to book or email reservations@auraskypool.com

Elevate your travels with Ubigi's connectivity

Imagine a world where staying connected while travelling is effortless. Ubigi, a global connectivity service that provides mobile data in 200-plus destinations, is reshaping the way travellers stay connected abroad.

The key lies in innovative eSIM technology – a digital SIM card that provides instant internet access to compatible devices, eliminating the need to swap physical SIM cards.



Ubigi's eSIM has many advantages. Activate Ubigi's prepaid eSIM data plans and say goodbye to roaming charges, which could save you up to 90%. Once installed, recharge your eSIM on the go via the app, without Wi-Fi or data credit.

Getting started is child's play: buy an eSIM data plan, receive the QR code by email, scan it and voila, connectivity as soon as you land!

Discover Ubigi, the ultimate travel companion. Visit ubigi.com/esim and use code EXPLORE to get 10% off your first order.

The priceless gift of a unique experience



Surprise your loved ones this festive season with a gift to JA Manafaru, an escape into a world of authentic Maldivian life. Cast your family away to this barefoot luxury private island offering a fun-packed, 16-day festive extravaganza hosted by the best of British talent.

Listen to nature's calling from the tropical forest canopy or the lapping of the ocean as you sleep; the selection of spacious beach villas, water villas and two-bedroom and three-bedroom residences, each with secluded gardens and pools, presents a choice for everyone this Christmas.

For parents who wish to split quality time with the kids and each other, JA Manafaru is one of only a few islands accredited by Worldwide Kids, one of the global leaders in luxury hotel childcare.

Contact the island reservations team on +960 650 0456 or by email at reservations.manafaru@jaresorts.com to discuss how JA Manafaru can make your Maldives experience unique to you. Visit jaresortshotels.com/maldives/ja-manafaru to learn more.



A location and experience like no other

Striking the perfect balance between individuality and exclusivity, The Omnia Mountain Lodge, with only 30 rooms and suites, is a destination experience that has expertly considered its location, architecture and design to deliver something extraordinary. The lodge is spectacularly perched on a rock, high above the roofs of Zermatt – with the Matterhorn as its neighbour.

Marrying the American concept of a traditional mountain lodge with the style and landscape of Europe, it has created a space where time slows down, and relaxation is encouraged. Custom-made furnishings that play with Modernism welcome guests into bedrooms and suites that overlook the villages and the mountains.

The unique wellness centre is a magical sanctuary. Nourish yourself from the inside out with their alpine dining experience. Executive chef Tony Rudolph creates dishes that are artistically crafted to emphasise alpine flavours with a modern twist. Whatever you are in the mountains for, you'll find it in The Omnia's distinctly contemporary setting.



Book your experience now at the-omnia.com

Enjoy beautiful walks year-round with a little support from Trionic



Regular walking can have huge benefits for your wellbeing, but when autumn and winter kick in, many people stay indoors.

If you're feeling anxious about getting out and about, check out Trionic. Their reliable rollators

combine design and function to keep you safe and steady while tackling uneven pavement, curbs, slippery paths and even rough terrain.

So don't stop enjoying nature, keep making the most of the great outdoors with Trionic.



To find out more, visit trionic.uk/sunday or call 0330 808 4399.



Rejuvenate your soul with utmost comfort



Galley Bay Resort is an all-inclusive beach resort with just 98 rooms, spanning 56 acres and an almost mile-long beach. It offers guests a chance to indulge in luxury, relaxation and breathtaking views throughout their stay. The crystal-clear waters, white-sand beaches and palm trees create a serene and peaceful atmosphere.

The rooms are spacious and luxurious, with king-sized



beds, private balconies or patios and modern amenities. Some rooms even come with private plunge pools – perfect for a romantic evening under the stars.

Galley Bay Resort offers couples the perfect romantic escape, with its beautiful beach, wide range of dining options and luxurious accommodations. The resort's emphasis on locally sourced ingredients, eco-friendly practices and sustainability also makes it a responsible and ethical choice for travellers. Guests can be assured of a truly unforgettable experience that will create memories that last a lifetime.



Book now at galleybayresort.com

Alderney – an island adventure close to home



Just a stone's throw from the south coast of England lies the beautiful island of Alderney. With

no crowds, no queues and no traffic jams, Alderney is often described as the 'hidden gem of the Channel Islands' and offers the safe, warm and relaxing escape you have been dreaming of.

On this small island, you are never far from the scenic coastline. You can walk the stunning cliff paths, enjoy the quiet, uncrowded sandy beaches or tuck into the local produce. Go birdwatching or discover Alderney's



fascinating heritage. Be entertained by a wide variety of events or simply enjoy a night of stargazing under the truly dark skies.

There is no other place in the world quite like Alderney. It's a friendly island with an easy pace of life, where children can still roam free.

An Alderney adventure awaits you, go to visitalderney.com to find out more.



Make it memorable, make it Matfen



Matfen Hall, the jewel in Northumberland's crown, is the perfect place to stay, dine and unwind this summer.

Boasting a selection of restaurants, bars and lounges, guests can enjoy five-star dining experiences in Emerald Restaurant, steak and seafood classics amongst the original architecture of Cloisters Restaurant and Bar and distinctive Afternoon Teas in The Orangery. For those with a passion for wine, The Wine Cellar offers personal tasting experiences, with their head sommelier providing

expert insight into the world's finest wines.

The Retreat, a tranquil spa, offers harmonious treatments that will leave guests feeling relaxed and revitalised before a dip in the pool and jacuzzi, while impressive golf courses allow players of all abilities to challenge themselves. Three championship-level courses provide golfers with enjoyable tests in the most magnificent surroundings, while a driving range and team of PGA professionals allow individual games to be developed.

A Northumberland backdrop can be explored with private chauffeur tours of local landmarks such as the world-famous Hadrian's Wall and Vindolanda.

Plan your Northumberland escape on 01661 886500 or email info@matfenhall.com to find out more.

Get where you need to go, faster

Voler Aviation Services Ltd were formed in 2014 and have established a worldwide network of private aircraft. They offer helicopter charter and private jet charter, as well as pilot training – all with the safety and comfort you can trust. They provide a bespoke service and will provide you with an aircraft suited to your exact requirements. Their team members listen to exactly what you are looking for and find a flexible and budget-friendly solution to suit your needs.

They are here to make the process of hiring your own aircraft as seamless as possible, ensuring you have all that you need for your journey. All operations are conducted under the guidelines and control of the relevant governing bodies and Air Operator Certificate holders. In the UK, all operations are flown by approved and regulated operators under the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).



They are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to serve all your aircraft needs. They are known for being very discreet and all requests are treated with the strictest confidentiality. No matter how unusual your request, they can find something to suit your unique requirements. Their services are available anywhere in the world – just get in touch to discuss your requirements.



Visit voleraviation.co.uk, call 01285 339025 or email info@voleraviation.co.uk to jump on board.

Looking for adventure?



Wavysail are specialists in small group, hands-on sailing adventures under the expert guidance of exceptionally experienced skippers. Wavysail skippers each have a minimum of 500,000 miles of ocean experience (that's the equivalent of 10 times round the world) and an incredible passion for the sea. With just six guests on each trip, you have plenty of time to learn while you explore, and they tailor the exact itinerary to your individual needs.

They have a trip for everyone, from a relaxing week in Croatia, a 10-day Scottish adventure to an epic 48-day expedition from Cape Town to the wild isolation of St Helena Island. They welcome single travellers as well as couples and 50% of their guests are female.

No prior sailing experience is needed, just the desire to explore and the willingness to get 'stuck in' to life on board a Wavysail expedition yacht.

Adventure awaits. Visit wavysail.com to find out more.



WINTER BLUES? NOT ON OUR WATCH



THE BEST DEALS OF THE WEEK

MULTI-CENTRE OFFERS

MALAYSIA & BALI from £1,429

10 nights 4* and 5* hotels, bed and breakfast including Qatar Airways flights and transfers

- See KL's famous Petronas Twin Towers and Batu Caves
- Relax on sugary sands or enjoy a massage by the sea in Bali
- **Save up to £230 per couple**

ADVENTURE BEACH MULTI CENTRE

NEW ZEALAND from £3,519

3 nights 4* hotels, 18 days campervan hire including Singapore Airlines flights and Interislander ferry

- Travel from Christchurch to Auckland by camper
- Discover glaciers, lakes and geothermal wonders
- **Save up to £320 per couple**

EXPLORE MOTORHOME SELF DRIVE

SOUTH AFRICA & MAURITIUS from £3,659

9 nights 4* and 5* hotels, all-inclusive* including flights and transfers

- Track down rhino and elephant on a guided safari
- Enjoy an evening 'bush bath' at Garonga Safari Camp
- Discover the best beaches in tropical Mauritius

SAFARI EXPLORE BEACH



MEXICO from £1,259

5* DREAMS TULUM RESORT AND SPA

7 nights all-inclusive including direct British Airways flights and transfers

- Enjoy dining in the six à la carte restaurants
- Try a variety of activities, including yoga and kayaking
- **Save up to £1,000 per couple**

FAMILY ALL INCLUSIVE SPA

CORFU from £1,379

5* IKOS DASSIA

7 nights all-inclusive including direct Easyjet flights

- Enjoy an all-inclusive luxury beach break in Corfu
- Discover local cuisine to Michelin-starred menus
- Activities and entertainment for the whole family

LUXURY BEACH FAMILY

THAILAND from £1,669

4* & 5* PHUKET, ELEPHANT HILLS & KHAO LAK

14 nights including breakfast*, Qatar Airways flights and transfers

- Includes one free night in Phuket
- Free upgrade to a Grand Deluxe Room in Khao Lak
- Enjoy the natural wonder of Elephant Hills

EXPLORE ADVENTURE BEACH

BEACH HOLIDAYS

TOP OFFERS

USA from £1,199

4* KIXBY NEW YORK

4 nights including direct United Airlines flights

- Free upgrade to a Lux King Room
- Includes a bottle of sparkling rose wine on arrival
- Stay in central Midtown just off Fifth Avenue

CITY EXPLORE COUPLES

MAURITIUS from £1,649

5* RADISSON BLU AZURI RESORT & SPA

7 nights all-inclusive including direct British Airways flights and transfers

- Free upgrade to all-inclusive
- Sip cocktails on the white sands of Mauritius
- **Save up to £1,100 per couple**

COUPLES BEACH LUXURY

ANTIGUA from £2,599

5* BLUE WATERS RESORT AND SPA

7 nights all-inclusive including direct British Airways flights

- Stay at one of the Caribbean's finest resorts
- Make the most of the four bars and three restaurants
- **Save up to £2,600 per couple**

LUXURY BEACH COUPLES



DUBAI & SRI LANKA from £1,399

10 nights 5* hotels, half board* including Emirates flights and transfers

- Free upgrade to half board in Sri Lanka
- Ride Sri Lanka's iconic train through tea plantations
- **Save up to £650 per couple**

MULTI CENTRE ADVENTURE CULTURE

BANGKOK & THAILAND from £1,829

11 nights 4* and 5* hotels, bed and breakfast including flights and transfers

- Discover the ancient golden temples of Chiang Mai
- Wander along the pure white sands of Samui's beaches
- **Save up to £230 per couple**

CITY CULTURE BEACH

ABU DHABI & THE MALDIVES from £1,899

9 nights 4* hotels, full board* including Etihad Airways flights and transfers

- Explore the cultural sites of Abu Dhabi
- Relax on pristine white-sand beaches in the Maldives
- **Save up to £570 per couple**

MULTI CENTRE CITY CULTURE



FREE STOPOVER

over **40** years
IN BUSINESS



call **0203 797 0415**,
visit our shops or **travelbag.co.uk**



SCAN ME

TRAVELBAG™
OUT THERE MADE EASY

Prices "from" act as an indication only and are per person based on 2 sharing/travelling together, subject to availability and including all taxes. DNATA reserve the right to withdraw/amend any offers at any time. Transfers not included unless otherwise specified. *2 days at Elephant Hills jungle safari is on a full board basis. ^1 night room only at Hilton Sandton. +Bed and breakfast in Dubai. #Room only in Abu Dhabi. Full terms and conditions apply please see travelbag.co.uk for full details.



THE BIG WEEKEND

Right at the centre of a Swiss holiday Venn diagram – with better looks than Basel, hipper hotels than Geneva and more of everything than Bern – stands Zurich. The good life comes on tap here, via days spent hiking the Uetliberg, ebiking the lakeside or lido-hopping along the Limmat River, and the result is a perfect summer city that, strangely, most visitors still bypass.

Maybe it's because Zurich's appeal is less about seeing big-ticket sights than simply being: watching ferries putt-putt across the namesake lake, waiting for riverside coffees, slipping into diamond-clear water at sunset or dancing at a warehouse party.

WHAT TO DO

● Design is ubiquitous here. Museum für Gestaltung, the city's twin-centred graphics archive (£11; museum-gestaltung.ch), is sacred ground for this, particularly during late summer's Zurich Design Weeks, which involve curator walks, open studios and cocktail parties (until September 19; designweeks.ch).

● Occupying the arches of a railway bridge in Zurich West, Im Viadukt is a co-operative of fashion retailers and a food market replete with an organic wine bar and takeaway counters (im-viadukt.ch). Another curiosity in the area is the shipping-container-tower HQ of Freitag, which makes messenger and tote bags from recycled truck tarps and seatbelts (freitag.ch).

● Above the Limmat, Zurich's old town splits into two mazy banks full of nooks and crannies, with the eastern Niederdorf delivering a sweep of squirrelled-away coffee shops, watch salons and galleries. Pop into the counterculture café Cabaret Voltaire for a dose of in-your-face dadaism, then cross the bridge to the Fraumünster for something less confrontational – its transepts house divine stained-glass wonders by Chagall and Giacometti (£4.50; fraumuenster.ch).

● The clear water at the city's irresistible lidos ("badis") looks fizzed and fully charged. There are at least a dozen to choose from, but the art nouveau Frauenbad at Stadthausquai is exclusively for women (£7; sportamt.ch), while Flussbad Unterer Letten has currents strong enough to count as proper adventure (free; stadt-zuerich.ch).

● Chocolate is the antidote to this – and Zurich's 200-year-old bean-to-bar tradition gets a Wonka makeover at Lindt's Home of Chocolate, a concept factory in suburban Kilchberg with a research lab for full-on geeks (£13.50; lindt-home-of-chocolate.com). A complete teeth-rotting tour should also encompass Läderach, Max Chocolatier and Sprüngli, three better-than-Bournville boutiques in the old town.

THE COOLEST NEIGHBOURHOOD

Step aside, Zurich West: Europaallee is the city's latest whirlpool of on-trend shops, restaurants and bars. It runs between Langstrasse (the gentrified red-light district) and Zürich Hauptbahnhof station, and on summer evenings its parasol-shaded cafés, one-off shops and ginkgo-tree-lined squares thrum with off-duty workers and mobile discos. The arrival last year of Google has accelerated new openings and festivals; the reborn Kulturhaus Kosmos will soon host the Zurich Film Festival, for example (September 28 to October 8; zff.com). Catch a movie, then drop in late to the bar Loft Five (cocktails from £15; loftfive.ch).



Take in the Alpine city's lakeside, lidos and late nights

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

Zunfthaus zur Waag

While eating in a medieval guild house is a Zurich specialty, this ornate restaurant inside the former weavers' hall is a stand-out. It's also the best place to try Zürcher Geschnetzeltes (veal in a cream mushroom sauce) – the city's signature dish (mains from £41; zunfthaus-zur-waag.ch).

Haus Hiltl

Don't be deceived by the Swiss people's lust for veal sausages and hard cheese: greens reign supreme at Haus Hiltl, a cult, family-run buffet specialist. But the world's oldest vegetarian restaurant (so they reckon; it opened in 1898) has also kept up with the times by rolling out the Alps' first veggie butcher (mains from £24; hiltl.ch).

Café and Conditorei 1842

This atmospheric atelier is worth the expense as its palm garden, frescoed sitting room and silver tray-carrying staff belong in another century. Opt for the coffee with homemade schnapps (£13) alongside a slice of bundt-like gugelhupf (cakes from £7.50; cafe1842.ch).

Rechberg 1837

A Michelin-worthy restaurant above the Niederdorf that bans anything imported or processed. Expect fish, meat and veg, but no pepper, spices, olive oil, chocolate or coffee. Lunch is served twice a month and dinners only from Tuesday to Saturday (from £125 for seven courses; rechberg1837.com).

“Pop into the café Cabaret Voltaire for a dose of dadaism”



Baur's

Formerly ranked as the world's best sommelier, Marc Almert now hangs his sabre at Baur au Lac, Zurich's grandest five-star hotel. Its champagne-happy brasserie Baur's has a wine card from Almert accompanying blowout bistro classics (mains from £38.50; baur-zurich.ch).

El Lokal

In a city of world-class cocktail joints (try Old Crow or Widder Bar), this funky bar and grill on the Sihl River is dressed to the nines in Latino props and acts as an introduction to Zurich's alternative nightlife (mains from £16.50; ellokal.ch).

WHERE TO STAY

Guesthouse fürDich

A vegan-friendly neighbourhood café with bedrooms above, this is easily the city's most sociable cheapie. There are just seven individually styled rooms – some with balconies, most with shared bathrooms – and early risers can benefit from fresh bagels and bowls of Bircher muesli (room-only doubles from £113; en.fuerdich.ch).

25hours Hotel Zurich Langstrasse

Only a block away from Zurich's gentrifying red-light district, this swaggering design hotel brims with thrift-store decor and self-reverence. There's easy access to the train station, Europaallee and Zurich West (B&B doubles from £170; 25hours-hotels.com).

Ambassador Zurich

Zurich's newest hotel is an ode to the city's once-booming textile industry – all of its fabrics, inlays and furniture are custom designed. What really dazzles, though, is the sparkly lakefront setting that is almost identical to that of the far swankier La Réserve Eden au Lac Zurich next door (B&B doubles from £290; ambassadorhotel.ch).

IF YOU ONLY DO ONE THING

Look out from the hilltop Lindenhof garden to see a lake, a river, three church towers and gabled houses galore. The green hills might also appeal to your inner Heidi.

By Mike MacEacheran, who was a guest of Zurich Tourism (zuerich.com) and 25hours Hotel Zürich Langstrasse

TIMES Travel

For dozens more guides to your favourite city-break destinations, and those you're still to discover, see our dedicated Times Travel website [thetimes.co.uk/travel](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/travel)

MY HOLS ROMAN KEMP

The presenter used to holiday in LA and Ibiza with his family, but now the Arctic is on his radar

Roman Kemp, 30, is a television and radio presenter. He has hosted the breakfast show on Capital FM since 2017. His parents are the actor and musician, Martin Kemp, and the Wham! singer Shirlee. He lives in south London.

“I was born in America and have a US passport, which comes in handy for Soccer Aid, when I get to play for the Rest of the World team.

Growing up, we would go to Los Angeles for family holidays. My parents had many friends there, so it was like a second home. We weren't beach people and would always be doing something active, or at the theme parks.

Another place that we would often visit was Ibiza. Mum shot the video for *Club Tropicana* at Pikes hotel and Dad partied there until his existence nearly ended.

George Michael was my godfather and we would stay at his house in St Tropez. He would send a helicopter to pick us up from Nice airport. I'm very aware that the circumstances I've been born into aren't "normal". I had the most privileged, amazing upbringing any child could ever ask for. One of the things I love the most is my family life and I'm so happy that I was born into this unit.



Mykonos in Greece, where Roman hired a villa for a holiday with his friends a few years ago

The first time I went away without my parents was the school French trip, which I credit for my lifelong fear of frogs. We were playing football when the ball went into long grass. I walked over to retrieve it and a frog jumped out, attached itself to my leg and refused to be moved.

My main friendship group was formed aged seven at prep school in Hertfordshire. We have remained close and this summer four of us did a road trip to some southern states in America. Next we have a big trip planned to Seoul. I want to go to the DMZ on the border to see North Korea. It's a lads' trip of sorts, before everyone starts having families.

When my best friend, Joe, died a few years ago, I hired a villa in Mykonos and said to my mates, "We're going away together and we will have a nice time." Travel and being with friends is what I choose to spend my money on.

These days I spend less time wanting a tiny island to myself and more on wanting to see and

experience the world. This year I've been to Santorini, Costa Rica and Iceland, which is the best holiday I've been on. We landed in Reykjavik and moved around the Golden Circle, taking in the glaciers, waterfalls and northern lights. Snorkelling between the tectonic plates was unbelievable. I ate fermented shark, one of the weirdest foods I have tasted.

I've travelled extensively for work. Taking part in *I'm a Celebrity* in the Australian outback was a highlight, but the standout was at the beginning of my Capital Radio career, when I went to China for three weeks. We visited places like Chengdu and Beijing and I FaceTimed my mum from the Great Wall.

I am a big fan of going away on my own. Quite often if I have a bank holiday off work I will do a solo city break. I love classical mythology and I've gone to Athens and Rome to check out the history. In July I spent a weekend in New York alone to watch Arsenal play.

Going away is really good for my mental health. It gives me perspective and time to clear my head. When it comes to properly

getting away, I struggle to sit still. My brain gets too distracted to read and I'm only good at lying on the beach for a bit, but I love an itinerary. In Costa Rica we would be in the jungle by day, then do midnight treks. That, for me, is an amazing holiday. I want to go to the Arctic Circle and Japan when I get some proper time off. My mum spent a lot of time there with Wham!, which she's always talking about.

We don't manage to go away together as a family any more because we've got different schedules. For my mother's 60th, though, my older sister, Harley, and I took her to Joshua Tree National Park in California. We hired an RV and after one night on board Mum was begging to be taken back to Sunset Boulevard.

Interview by Shelley Rubenstein

Roman Kemp is working with Virgin Media O2 for its new campaign to highlight roaming charges for holidaymakers this summer (virginmediao2.co.uk)

COMPETITION

WIN A
DEVON
BREAK
WORTH
£2,100
AT LYMPSTONE
MANOR

WHERE WAS I?

A forest: that's what I wanted to see before my flight, and my friend has obliged with an area of conifers managed by Forestry England. It lies in an area of older woodland that spreads between two towns — and is named after a cross-Channel saint.

But that's not to say Friend is enjoying himself. "Let's get on the trail of that musician," he suggests. We've learnt that a singer-songwriter, originally from Lancashire, spent many of his formative years in the larger of the two towns, northeast of us. He also formed a band there.

No thanks. It's so wonderfully pretty here, I'd rather stay put. And no, I don't want to shop for holiday toothpaste either. Friend reckons we could buy it in a village with a suggestive name nearby.

I am, however, interested in his third idea. He says a comedian (mother, Deirdre) was for a time at a school

three miles southeast of the larger town's centre. "Surely it would be worth a visit? We've got loads of time," he boasts. Actually, we don't, but I agree to a quick look.

So it is that, east of the suggestive village, we glide to a halt in another wood. The sun's gone in so it's nice, but dim.

"It's not one of those forest schools?" I ask, surprised. "No," says Friend. "Then why have we stopped?" I ask. "I've run out petrol," he admits.

My gate closes in 90 minutes. "Remember, boys don't cry," counsels Friend.

"We might have to see about that," I growl. At which point Friend seems to change his mind about woodland walks — and legs it, into the trees.

Sean Newsom

THE QUESTIONS

- 1 What's the surname of the singer-songwriter?
- 2 What's the name of the school?



THE PRIZE

The winner and guest will stay for two nights, B&B, in a suite at Lympstone Manor — Michael Caines's elegant gastronomic hotel on the banks of the Exe estuary. Set in 28 acres of grounds, this Georgian manor forms part of the Michael Caines Collection, alongside the

Cove, a beachside restaurant and bar at Maenporth, and Mickeys Beach Bar and Restaurant in Exmouth. Its restaurant has held a Michelin star since 2017 and serves its own wine. This October, Lympstone Manor launches its Classic Cuvée, the first sparkling wine from the hotel's vineyard. For details, visit lympstonemanor.co.uk.

The prize includes an à la carte Michelin-starred dinner for two (excluding drinks), a vineyard tour and a bottle of Classic Cuvée. It must be taken before April 3, 2024, subject to availability and excluding bank holiday weekends, Valentine's Day and December 24 to January 1.

HOW TO ENTER

Answer the questions and complete the entry form at thetimes.co.uk/travel/where-was-i by the end of Wednesday, September 6. One entry per person. Full terms and conditions apply, and your information will be used in accordance with our privacy policy at newsprivacy.co.uk.

LAST WEEK'S PRIZE

The answers are **Thomas and St Pancras**. Christopher Jones from Lancashire wins a stay for three nights, B&B, at Le Grand Mazarin, a new five-star hotel in Paris.

THE 6★ ALL-INCLUSIVE NO-FLY ICELAND & GREENLAND SALE

SAVE UP TO 50%[±]

Included
DRINKS, GRATUITIES,
SPECIALITY
DINING & WI-FI**

Exclusive Free
PRIVATE UK
CHAUFFEUR
SERVICE**

**GUARANTEED
LOWEST FARES WITH
READER OFFERS**

UP TO
55 Included
SHORE EXCURSIONS*

**JUST A DEPOSIT
REQUIRED THEN
NOTHING TO PAY
UNTIL NEXT YEAR**

Regent

SEVEN SEAS CRUISES®

AN UNRIVALLED EXPERIENCE™

With over 25 years' experience, we are proud to be the UK's No.1 Independent Cruise Specialist, providing a dedicated 5★ service whilst ensuring that each cruise holiday offers incredible value for money. As a top partner to Regent Seven Seas Cruises® we are delighted to present the 6★ all-inclusive no-fly Iceland & Greenland Sale, where you can save up to 50%[±] - EXCLUSIVELY with Reader Offers! Book today with Reader Offers Ltd with just a deposit and receive a host of exclusive benefits, plus with payment plans available you can spread the cost so there's never been a better time to secure your ABTA and ATOL-protected holiday!

20 NIGHTS DEPARTING 5TH AUGUST 2024

AUGUST 2024

**YOUR EXCLUSIVE FREE PRIVATE UK CHAUFFEUR
WILL TRANSFER YOU TO THE PORT IN STYLE****

Mon 5 **Embark the ultra-luxurious 6★ *Seven Seas Navigator*® and depart Southampton for your 20 night all-inclusive voyage**

Wed 7 **Kirkwall, Orkney Islands** (arrive late am)

Thu 8 **Tórshavn, Faroe Islands** (arrive late am)

Sat 10 **Akureyri, Iceland**
★Recommended INCLUDED Excursion*:
Godafoss and leisurely Akureyri
Travel to thundering Godafoss Waterfall, then tour Akureyri and the world's most northerly botanical garden. Plunging down in a roaring torrent from its high horseshoe-shaped rim, Godafoss is one of Iceland's most impressive natural wonders

Sun 11 **Ísafjörður, Iceland**

Mon 12 - **Reykjavík, Iceland** (overnight –depart early pm)

Tue 13 ★Recommended INCLUDED Excursion*:
Whale Watching
Board a specialised whale watching vessel and head out into the bay. With your guide helping you know when and where to look, keep your eyes peeled for the most exciting of marine mammals: minke, humpback and killer whales. Expect to also spot white-beaked dolphins, harbour porpoises, seals and seabirds

★Recommended INCLUDED Excursion*:

Bathing in the Blue Lagoon

Travel into the scenic, volcanic Reykjanes Peninsula to visit one of Iceland's most famous landmarks. Experience the geothermal seawater famed for its restorative effects on the skin, and ability to wash away the stress of modern life in minutes

Cruising Prince Christian Sound

Nuuk, Greenland

Paamiut, Greenland

Qaqortoq, Greenland

★Recommended INCLUDED Excursion*:

Hike along the Great Lake

Enjoy a guided hike through Qaqortoq and out to its tranquil Great Lake. Learn about the local flora and fauna as you circle this unspoiled blue expanse of glacier-fed water

Cruising Prince Christian Sound

Killybegs, Ireland

Belfast, Northern Ireland

Arrive in Southampton

**YOUR EXCLUSIVE FREE PRIVATE UK CHAUFFEUR
WILL BE AWAITING YOUR ARRIVAL TO TRANSFER
YOU HOME IN STYLE****

Dates not mentioned are spent relaxing at sea

Whale, Iceland



Seven Seas Navigator®



Blue Lagoon, Iceland



WHAT'S INCLUDED IN YOUR EXCLUSIVE READER OFFERS LTD PROMOTION

**BOOK WITH A TOP PARTNER FOR
REGENT SEVEN SEAS CRUISES®
SAVE UP TO 50% - EXCLUSIVE FARES
WILL INCREASE**

PLUS, book by 8pm 10th September 2023 and receive an **EXCLUSIVE FREE Champagne Gift Box** with our compliments*

EARN EXCLUSIVE CRUISE MILES®

Up to 41,198 Cruise Miles®, worth £411 off your next booking with Reader Offers Ltd††



- **EXCLUSIVE FREE** Private UK Chauffeur Service up to 100 miles each way for all bookings**
- **20 NIGHTS** all-inclusive 6★ no-fly cruising on board the ultra-luxurious *Seven Seas Navigator*®, including:
 - Unrivalled Space at Sea™ – only 496 guests on board with an incredible staff-to-guest ratio and ample space
 - Up to 55 **INCLUDED** shore excursions*
 - **INCLUDED** speciality restaurant dining throughout**
 - **INCLUDED** unlimited drinks including fine wines and premium spirits, plus in-suite mini-bar replenished daily**
 - **INCLUDED** pre-paid gratuities**
 - **INCLUDED** unlimited Wi-Fi for all suites**
 - **INCLUDED** butler service for Penthouse Suites & above
 - **INCLUDED** 24-hour room service & laundry valet

YOUR EXCLUSIVE READER OFFERS LTD SALE FARES

SUITE	GRADE	BROCHURE FARE (PP)	READER OFFERS LTD FARE (PP)
Deluxe Window Suite (1 left!)	H	£15,639	£7,399
Deluxe Veranda Suite	F	£17,669	£8,869
Concierge Suite	D	£18,789	£9,699
Penthouse Suite	C	£19,399	£10,099
Navigator Suite	NS	£24,659	£20,599

Solo fares are available on request

**JUST A DEPOSIT REQUIRED TO SECURE
YOUR BOOKING**

www.rolcruise.co.uk

TRAVEL WITH
CONFIDENCE

Agent to ATOL Holder
Regent Seven Seas
Cruises 10297

ABTA
ABTA No F9295

CALL ONE OF OUR
CRUISE SPECIALISTS FREE ON

0808 239 8349

QUOTE OFFER REF 632652

OPEN 7 DAYS
8:30AM – 8PM



Fares are per person based on two adults sharing, may increase or be withdrawn at any time. Offer applies to new bookings only. Ports may require a tender. +Champagne Gift Box is based on one per booking, for UK mainland addresses only. **Subject to the cruise line's T&Cs. †Savings are based on two adults sharing the lowest grade advertised. *Included shore excursions exclude Regent Choice Excursions and private arrangements. Some shore excursions will be unsuitable for guests with mobility restrictions. Shore excursions mentioned are subject to change and can be booked up to 365 days prior to departure - depending on suite grade. ††Cruise Miles® T&Cs apply. Regent Seven Seas Cruises® T&Cs apply. E&OE.

★★ LIMITED CABINS AT THESE EXCLUSIVE FARES - ONLY AVAILABLE WITH READER OFFERS LTD ★★

THE BESTSELLING 2024 MAIDEN ANTARCTICA SOUTH GEORGIA & THE FALKLANDS EXPEDITION

UK'S TOP AGENT FOR
**HURTIGRUTEN
EXPEDITIONS**

**EXCLUSIVE
SAVINGS OF UP TO
£6,000***

**MS MAUD'S
MAIDEN SEASON
IN ANTARCTICA**

**5 DAYS OF
ANTARCTICA
EXPLORATION**

DRINKS, WI-FI,
EXPEDITION LANDINGS
& DAILY ACTIVITIES
INCLUDED***

**BOOK BY 8PM
13TH SEPTEMBER
2023 FOR EXTRA
DISCOUNT OF UP TO
£925±**

27 NIGHTS DEPARTING 29TH OCTOBER 2024

OCTOBER 2024

Book an Arctic Superior Cabin (P2) or above and your EXCLUSIVE FREE Private UK Chauffeur will transfer you to the airport in style**

Tue 29 **Fly from London to Buenos Aires, Argentina**
Wed 30 **Buenos Aires, Argentina**
Upon arrival, transfer to a hotel for your two night stay, including breakfast

Thu 31 **Buenos Aires, Argentina**
Explore this exciting destination at your leisure (B)

NOVEMBER 2024

Fri 1 **Buenos Aires, Argentina**
Transfer to the port and embark **MS Maud** on her maiden season in Antarctica, for your 22 night voyage
Tue 5 - **Falkland Islands** (two nights)
Thu 7 The Falkland archipelago is filled with seamless horizons and white sands teeming with birdlife. Only the occasional farm dots the landscape amidst the grassy hills and wildflowers. Enjoy a community walk around Stanley, taking in the Jubilee Villas gardens, Christ Church Cathedral, and the Historic Dockyard Museum

Sun 10 - **South Georgia** (two nights)
Tue 12 South Georgia's abundant wildlife has earned it the nickname 'Serengeti of the Southern Ocean'. Its unique position free from sea ice makes the island a breeding site for large colonies of penguins, other seabirds and seals. In fact, it's an Important Bird Area, home to albatrosses, petrels, shags, skuas and terns. Throughout your three days in the area, you will land as often as possible to explore the wilderness and wildlife

Fri 15 - **Antarctica** (four nights)
Tue 19 Nothing prepares you for your first sight of Antarctica's immense, frozen beauty. Icebergs, sculpted by nature, float in the straits. Gentoo, Chinstrap and Adélie Penguins watch from the shores. Countless seabirds wheel overhead. Nature is in charge. You'll spend five exciting days exploring

several possible landing sites, on and around the Antarctic Peninsula and South Shetland Islands. Each day will offer something different and thrilling. You might sail into a flooded volcanic caldera or land in icy bays, where remnants of whaling paraphernalia lie abandoned. You may also get a chance to go kayaking among icebergs and seals, or snowshoe to a stunning viewpoint. Bird enthusiasts should look skywards for Antarctic seabirds such as skuas, petrels and terns. Through onboard lectures and onshore talks, you'll learn more about this precious habitat and how we can all protect it for the future

Wed 20 - **Cruising the Drake Passage**

Fri 22 Five unforgettable days in Antarctica are over, and **MS Maud** now embarks upon your final adventure together: the Drake Passage. Known for its potentially high winds and strong currents, the passage can also be silent and still, inspiring the nicknames 'The Drake Shake' and 'The Drake Lake' respectively. During your crossing, the Expedition Team will recap your experiences

Sat 23 **Punta Arenas, Chile**

Disembark and transfer to the airport for your flight to Santiago, Chile. Upon arrival, transfer to a hotel for your overnight stay, including breakfast

Sun 24 **Santiago, Chile**

Transfer to the airport for your flight to London

Mon 25 **Arrive in London**

Book an Arctic Superior Cabin (P2) or above and your EXCLUSIVE FREE Private UK Chauffeur will be waiting to transfer you home in style**

Dates not mentioned are spent relaxing at sea. Please note - weather, wind and ice conditions have a great influence on the itinerary and the ship's Captain will decide the final sailing schedule. Therefore, the itinerary is subject to change. Meals are included on the tour as stated: B=Breakfast. All meals are included on the cruise

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN YOUR EXCLUSIVE READER OFFERS LTD PROMOTION

EXCLUSIVE SAVINGS OF UP TO £6,000*

- **EXCLUSIVE FREE** UK Chauffeur Service, up to 100 miles each way, for Arctic Superior Cabins (P2) and above**
- **TWO NIGHT 4★** pre-cruise hotel stay in Buenos Aires, Argentina†, including breakfast
 - **COMPLIMENTARY** Dinner & Tango show for all bookings
- 22 nights full board voyage on board **MS Maud** including:
 - **FREE** wind and water-resistant jacket
 - A rich programme of activities including escorted landings with small expedition boats while in Antarctica
 - Professional English-speaking Expedition Team that give lectures as well as accompany landings and activities
 - All meals including beverages (beer & wine, sodas and mineral water in the Aune restaurant)
 - Book an Expedition Suite with Balcony (ME) or above and dine in the à la carte Lindstrøm for **FREE**
 - Loan of boots, trekking poles and equipment needed
 - **FREE** tea and coffee
 - **FREE** Wi-Fi on board for all guests**
 - Gratuities are not expected nor required
- **OVERNIGHT** post-cruise 4★ hotel stay in Santiago, Chile†, including breakfast
- Return flights from London (regional and premium class flights may be available on request*) and overseas transfers

EARN EXCLUSIVE CRUISE MILES®

Up to **58,998** Cruise Miles® when booking this exclusive voyage, worth **£589** off your next booking with Reader Offers Ltd††



YOUR EXCLUSIVE READER OFFERS LTD SALE FARES

CABIN	GRADE	FULL FARE (PP)	NOW FARE (PP)
Polar Inside	I2	£9,399	£7,699
Polar Outside	N2	£10,999	£9,499
Arctic Superior	P2	£11,899	£10,399
Expedition Suite	Q2	£20,799	£18,799
Grand Suite	MG	£25,999	£23,599
Owner's Suite	MX	£32,499	£29,499

Solo fares are available from **£10,599**

**JUST A DEPOSIT REQUIRED TO SECURE YOUR
PREFERRED CABIN**

YOUR EXPEDITION HIGHLIGHTS

Southern Ocean islands of wonder

From its windswept green hills and the white-sand beaches, there is much beauty and charm in the Falkland Islands. And while the wildlife here is plentiful, South Georgia is in a class of its own, and the beaches heave with seals, penguins, and other seabirds.

Amazing Antarctic wildlife

At this time of year, the snow is fresh from winter, and in the sea towering icebergs glisten in their newly sculpted grandeur while on land the penguins are courting and nest-building. You will explore several landing sites where you can truly experience the frozen continent up close.



www.rolcruise.co.uk
TRAVEL WITH
CONFIDENCE



ABTA

CALL ONE OF OUR
CRUISE SPECIALISTS FREE ON

0808 239 3403

QUOTE OFFER REF **632651**

OPEN 7 DAYS
8:30AM - 8PM



Please note, this is MS Maud's maiden season in Antarctica and not her inaugural season. Fares are per person based on two adults sharing, except single cabins, may increase or be withdrawn at any time. Offer applies to new bookings only. **Chauffeur service is based on two adults sharing, up to 100 miles each way and is tiered depending on grade booked. Extra mileage is at an additional supplement. †Will incur supplementary costs and may require an additional overnight stay. Flights are subject to schedule changes and may be based on indirect services with flights arriving same day or overnight. Flights will be confirmed closer to departure which may affect your overall holiday duration and an additional overnight hotel stay may be required. ‡Savings are based on two adults sharing. ††Subject to the cruise line's T&Cs. *Expedition activities are optional and must be booked in advance, pre-bookable excursions are at a supplement and must be booked at least 28 days prior to departure. Excursions are subject to change. Wildlife sightings are not guaranteed. ‡Star ratings are ROL Cruise classified. ††Cruise Miles® T&Cs apply. Hurtigruten T&Cs apply. E&OE.

Your holiday is ABTA and ATOL protected when you book with Imagine Holidays.



Fully protected



Amazing value



Exceptional service and expertise



Trustpilot



Excellent



TIMESTravelOffers



Celebrity **X** Cruises®

All-Inclusive New Years Bali Escape with Luxury Celebrity South Asia Cruise

18 nights | December 28, 2024 | Prices from £3,499pp



EXPERIENCE NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS IN BALI | CLASSIC DRINKS WI-FI & TIPS INCLUDED

Bring in 2025 in true island style in bountiful Bali during a five-night hotel stay before enjoying a luxury, all-inclusive cruise to Singapore.

Phenomenal beach parties, spectacular fireworks, vibrant festivals, and extravagant rooftop parties: Bali is the perfect place to celebrate the turn of the year. Arriving on December 29 you'll settle into a five-night beach escape at the luxurious Nusa Dua Hotel & Spa and welcome in the new year in style during a

fabulous Gala dinner.

Next, you'll join the elegant Celebrity Millennium® for a spellbinding cruise of Southeast Asia. A vessel oozing with luxurious sophistication, Celebrity Millennium® offers a refined cruise with the finest modern comforts. Highlights of your voyage include Celukan Bawang with its vibrant coral reefs, golden temple infused Penang, Langkawi's lush waterfalls and Phuket's heavenly beaches.



Experience Bali

Bali is an island blessed with a cornucopia of natural wonders that include volcanos, lush rainforests and glorious beaches. But the 'Island of the Gods' is also enriched by a vibrant culture. Discover its traditional 'gamelan' music, played with a multitude of percussive instruments, and watch the elegant choreography of elaborate Balinese dancers.

You could also explore hidden cliff-side temples while walking mountain trails or hit the lively coastal Kuta resort town.

Your Holiday Includes

All-Inclusive Cruise

- 12 night all-inclusive cruise on board Celebrity Millennium®
- Visiting: Bali, Lombok, Celukan Bawang, Kuala Lumpur, Penang (overnight in port), Langkawi, Phuket (overnight in port), Singapore
- Classic Drinks Package, Wi-Fi and Tips

Hotel Stay

- Five-night five-star all-inclusive stay in Bali at the Nusa Dua Beach Hotel & Spa with New Year's Eve gala dinner

All Flights and Transfers

- London departure – regional flights available

Fly Cruise prices from

INSIDE	£3,499 _{pp}
OCEAN VIEW	£3,999 _{pp}
VERANDA	Sold Out
CONCIERGE CLASS	£4,999 _{pp}
AQUAClass®	£5,699 _{pp}

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: ASA7784

IMAGINE
CRUISING
MORE THAN JUST A CRUISE.

For Imagine Cruising bookings call

0808 304 6498

thetimes.co.uk/imagine

Opening Hours: Monday to Sunday 9am–8pm

T **TIMES**TravelOffers



Princess Cruises Full Transit Panama Canal Discovery



16 nights | Jan & Feb, 2024 | Prices from £1,799pp*

COMPLIMENTARY HOTEL STAY IN LOS ANGELES OR MIAMI*

A menagerie of cultures, vivid skies and natural wonders await on this magical cruise holiday travelling the world-famous Panama Canal and highlighting the treasures of Central and South America.

Arriving in Miami, you'll begin your holiday with an overnight stay, before joining the magnificent Emerald Princess® in port, for your incredible 15-night cruise.

A journey like no other, you'll enjoy calls to Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Mexico

affording lush rainforests, golden sands and intriguing coffee plantations, as well as a full transit of the revered Panama Canal.

One of the world's greatest marvels, a scenic cruise through the Panama Canal will truly be one to remember. As you sail from the Pacific to the Atlantic, you'll pass colonial cities and exotic scenery, encountering diverse wildlife from colourful parrots to charming sloths. disembark in Southampton, concluding your extraordinary holiday.



Explore Puerto Vallarta

Located in the sparkling blue Bay of Banderas, Puerto Vallarta is one of Mexico's most enticing treasures. Puerto Vallarta's azure skies, golden sands are embraced by the Sierra Madre Mountain.

Be sure to stroll along the oceanfront Malecón which offers endless bars, restaurants, regional art, culture and entertainment. Here, you'll witness the most magnificent sunsets setting over the Pacific.

Your Holiday Includes

Full-Board Cruise

- 15 night full-board cruise on board Emerald Princess®
- **Visiting†:** Fort Lauderdale, Cartagena, Panama Canal (Scenic Cruising), Fuerte Amador, San Juan del Sur, Huatulco, Puerto Vallarta, Los Angeles

Complimentary Hotel Stay

- One-night four-star hotel stay at the Novotel Miami Brickell*

All Flights and Optional Transfers^

- London departure – regional flights available

Fly Cruise prices from*

INTERIOR	£1,799pp
OCEANVIEW	£1,999pp
BALCONY	£2,599pp
MINI-SUITE	£3,699pp

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: AME7696

*Hotel based on January 21, 2024 departure. ^Transfers are available at an additional cost. †Prices and itinerary shown are based on January 21, 2024 departure.

IMAGINE
CRUISING
MORE THAN JUST A CRUISE.

For Imagine Cruising bookings call

0808 304 6498

thetimes.co.uk/imagine
Opening Hours: Monday to Sunday 9am–8pm

TIMES Travel Offers



Luxury Cunard Voyage from Tokyo to Vancouver & Mount Fuji Discovery

21 nights | May 22, 2024 | Prices from £2,699pp



SAVE UP TO £1,200 PER COUPLE* | EXCLUSIVE PRICE TO IMAGINE CRUISING

Absorb the awe-inspiring beauty of Mount Fuji during a two-night Tokyo stay, before a captivating transpacific voyage to icy Alaska and snow-capped Canada.

Your epic holiday begins with two nights in Tokyo, where you'll enjoy a fully escorted tour of the majestic Mount Fuji, and soar over hot springs on the Hakone Ropeway cable car.

You'll then embark the elegant Queen Elizabeth for your transpacific cruise, sailing for diverse and historic Hakodate, and the snow-dusted

mountains of Aomori.

Next, a once-in-a-lifetime crossing of the International Date Line awaits, before you'll encounter wintry Alaska. Here, you'll behold the colossal Hubbard Glacier and glimpse humpback whales cruising through Glacier Bay.

Following a stop in bustling Victoria, you'll bid farewell to your peerless vessel in Vancouver, where you'll absorb its eclectic atmosphere during a city tour.



Explore tantalising Tokyo

Tokyo is a city that never sleeps, offering endless opportunities for exploration, inspiration and discovery. Japan's bustling capital, it seamlessly combines tradition and modernity.

In Shinjuku and Shibuya, immerse yourself in the bright lights and towering skyscrapers, or discover ancient temples and tranquil gardens in historic Asakusa. Delectable cuisine, from sushi to ramen, can be found in countless eateries.

Your Holiday Includes

Full-Board Cruise

- 19 night full-board cruise on board Queen Elizabeth
- **Visiting:** Tokyo, Hakodate, Aomori, Kodiak, Seward, Hubbard Glacier (scenic cruising), Icy Strait Point (scenic cruising), Glacier Bay (scenic cruising), Victoria, Vancouver

Complimentary Fully Escorted Tours

- Tour of Mount Fuji including the Hakone Ropeway cable car
- Boat trip across Lake Ashi
- High-speed bullet train to Tokyo
- Vancouver City Tour

Complimentary Hotel Stay

- Two-night four-star hotel stay at the Grand Nikko Tokyo Daiba

Complimentary Flights and Transfers

- London departure - regional flights available

Fly Cruise prices from

INSIDE	£2,699 _{pp}
OCEANVIEW	£2,999 _{pp}
BALCONY	£3,499 _{pp}
GRILL SUITE	£5,999 _{pp}

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: ASA7849

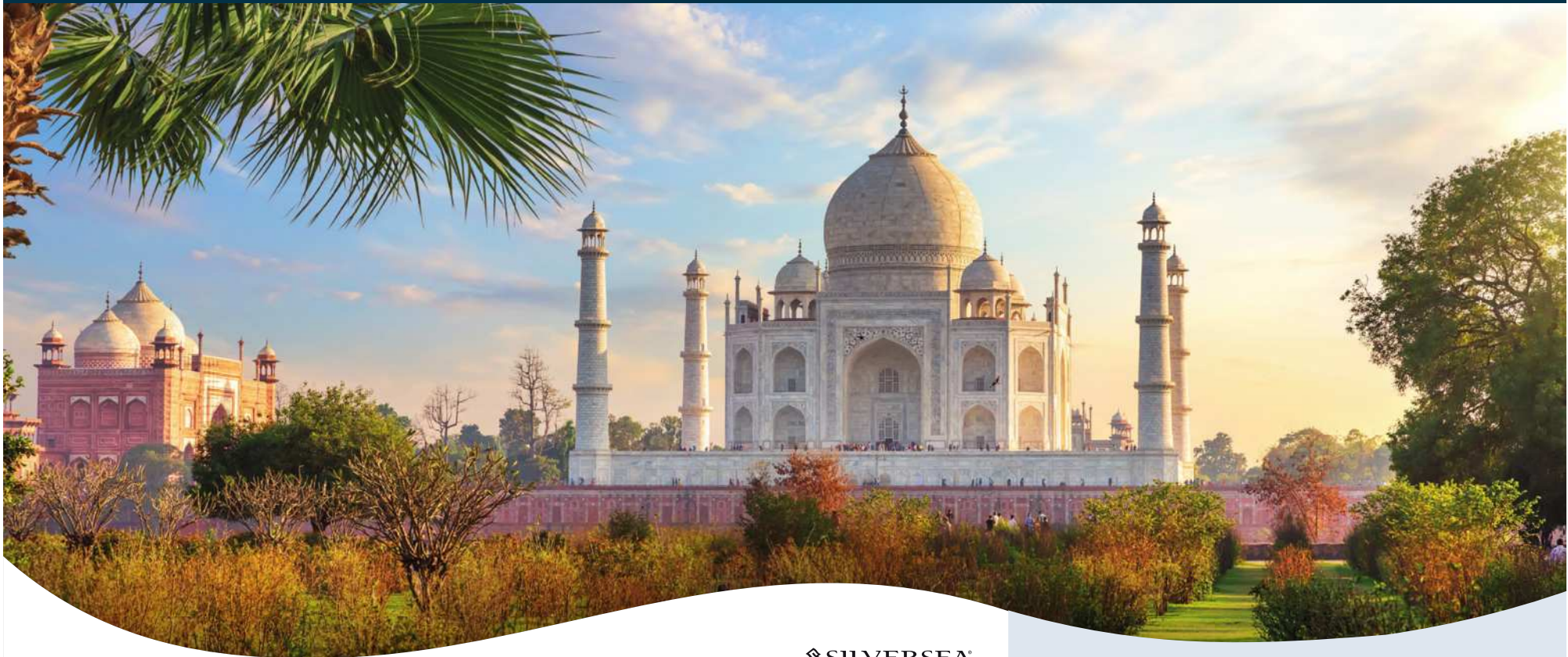
*Prices shown include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing a Grill Suite. Main image is intended for illustrative purposes only.

**IMAGINE
CRUISING**
MORE THAN JUST A CRUISE.

For Imagine Cruising bookings call

0808 304 6498

thetimes.co.uk/imagine
Opening Hours: Monday to Sunday 9am-8pm



SILVERSEA®

Luxury All-Inclusive Silversea Voyage & Golden Triangle Discovery

24 nights | January 25, 2024 | Prices from £5,499pp



SAVE UP TO £4,000 PER COUPLE^

Embark on a Arabian Gulf cruise from Dubai, exploring vibrant ports and iconic landmarks.

Delight in an unforgettable journey through the Arabian Gulf, starting with a night in Dubai. Set sail to Abu Dhabi and Dammam for overnights in port, where you could explore their vibrant cultures. Continue to Al Manama, Doha, and Sir Bani Yas, immersing yourself in their beauty. Discover the stunning landscapes of Khasab and Khor Fakkan before an overnight in port in Muscat.

Disembark in Mumbai for a night's stay before embarking on the Golden Triangle tour.

Experience magical Delhi with its blend of old and new, followed by a visit to the iconic Taj Mahal in Agra. En route to Jaipur, explore the historic Fatehpur Sikri. Conclude the tour with sightseeing at the majestic Amber Fort before returning to Delhi for one final night.



Discover India's Golden Triangle

The varied jewels of India come alive with a world-renowned Golden Triangle tour. Discover India's major cities including Jaipur, where you'll find the epic hilltop Amber Fort. In Delhi, other vibrant sights include Red Fort, where luminous orange walls are a stark contrast to its verdant gardens.

The highlight of your tour is Agra, where lies the ivory-white Taj Mahal: a 240-foot mausoleum that personifies India's artistry, wealth, and prosperity.

Your Holiday Includes

All-Inclusive Cruise

- 16 night all-inclusive luxury cruise on board *Silver Moon*
- **Visiting:** Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Dammam, Al Manamah, Doha, Sir Bani Yas Island, Khasab, Khor Fakkan, Muscat, Mumbai
- Complimentary premium shore excursions included at every port*

Complimentary Luxury Hotel Stays

- Five-star hotel stays in Dubai, Mumbai, Delhi, Agra and Jaipur

Complimentary Fully Escorted Tours

- Tour of Jama Masjid Mosque, Raj Ghat, Humayun's Tomb, Qutub Minar and more
- Tour of the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort
- Tour of Amber Fort by Jeep, Hawa Mahal and the City Palace

All Flights and Transfers

- London departure - regional flights available

Fly Cruise prices from

VISTA SUITE	£5,499pp
CLASSIC VERANDA SUITE	£6,499pp
SUPERIOR VERANDA SUITE	£6,799pp
DELUXE VERANDA SUITE	£7,099pp

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: ASA7879

*Offer includes one excursion per guest, per port/day. Additional excursions available at an extra charge. ^Prices shown include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing a Deluxe Veranda Suite.

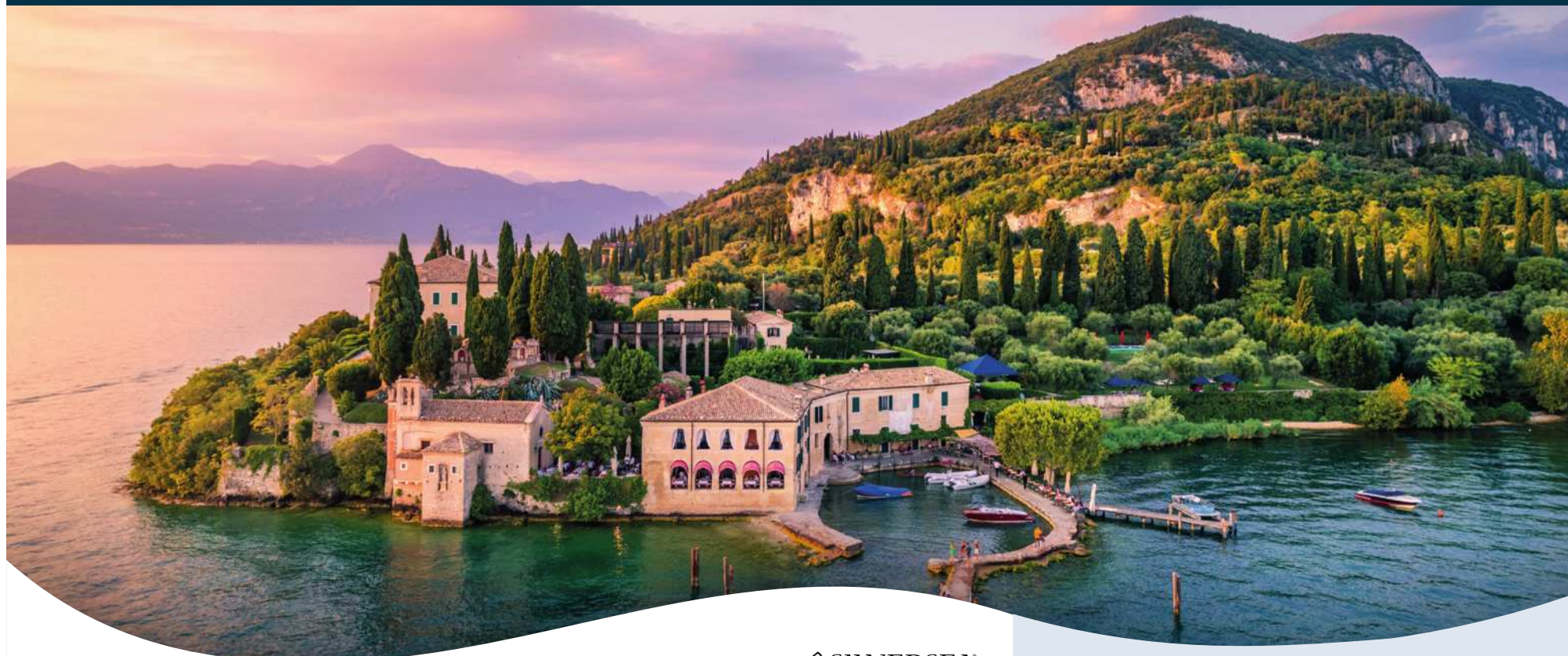
IMAGINE
CRUISING
MORE THAN JUST A CRUISE.

For Imagine Cruising bookings call

0808 304 6498

thetimes.co.uk/imagine
Opening Hours: Monday to Sunday 9am-8pm

TIMES Travel Offers



SILVERSEA®

Luxury All-Inclusive Silversea Mediterranean Voyage & Duo of Italian Lakes

14 - 19 nights | Jun - Oct, 2024 | Prices from £4,999pp**



SAVE UP TO £5,000 PER COUPLE^ | COMPLIMENTARY SIX-NIGHT ITALIAN LAKES ESCAPE

Lose yourself in the majestic surroundings of Italy's enchanting lakes during a series of tours and hotel stays before an all-inclusive luxury Eastern Mediterranean cruise.

Explore the natural attractions and fascinating culture of Lake Garda and Lake Maggiore during hotel stays, paired with memorable tours.

Savour unique flavours during a wine tasting experience, venture across alpine meadows on a Bernina Express rail journey and explore the charms of Lake Como.

Following a stay in Venice, you'll transfer to Civitavecchia to embark *Silver Spirit* for your all-inclusive, luxury cruise. With an enviable staff-to-guest ratio, your every whim will be catered to as you sail to fascinating and enriching ports such as Italy's Naples, Montenegro, Croatia on the Adriatic coast, and Piran in Slovenia.

Savour gastronomic delights at the eight restaurants on board and sip a complimentary cocktail while taking in views from the Panorama Lounge.



The Bernina Express

This memorable journey takes you past sapphire-hued glaciers and dramatic, jagged mountains, as well as astonishing architectural wonders like the single-track Brusio spiral viaduct with its nine stone arches.

Pass through the spectacular Bernina Pass, with views of Lake Bianco and the snow-clad Morteratsch Glacier before reaching the glamorous resort town St. Moritz.

Your Holiday Includes

All-Inclusive Cruise

- Ten-night all-inclusive luxury cruise on board *Silver Spirit**
- **Visiting:** Civitavecchia, Naples (overnight in port), Syracuse, Valletta, Kotor, Korčula, Zadar, Piran, Venice
- Complimentary premium shore excursions included at every port*

Complimentary Rail Journey

- Scenic rail journey through the Swiss Alps on board the Bernina Express

Complimentary Fully Escorted Tours

- Lake Garda wine tasting
- Full day Lake Como tour

Hotel Stays

- **Complimentary** three-night four-star hotel stays in Lake Garda and Lake Maggiore
- One-night four-star stay in Florence at the Grand Hotel Baglioni
- All hotel stays include breakfast

All Flights and Transfers

- London departure – regional flights available

Fly Cruise prices from**

VISTA SUITE	£4,999pp
CLASSIC VERANDA SUITE	£5,799pp
SUPERIOR VERANDA SUITE	£6,299pp
DELUXE VERANDA SUITE	£6,599pp

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: MED7754

*Offer includes one excursion per guest, per port/day. ^Prices include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing a Deluxe Veranda Suite. Additional excursions available at an extra charge. +Itinerary and ship and hotel stays will vary depending on departure date. **Prices, itinerary and ship based on October 8, 2024 departure.

**IMAGINE
CRUISING**
MORE THAN JUST A CRUISE.

For Imagine Cruising bookings call

0808 304 6498

thetimes.co.uk/imagine

Opening Hours: Monday to Sunday 9am–8pm

T TIMES Travel Offers

Ultra-Luxury

Caribbean Discovery

& Barbados Beach Retreat

12 - 15 NIGHTS | NOVEMBER 2023 & JANUARY 2024

Includes a complimentary five-star all-inclusive hotel stay in Barbados





Ocean Terrace Suite 1 from*	Ocean Terrace Suite 2 from*	Ocean Terrace Suite 3 from*	Ocean Grand Terrace Suite from*	Ocean Penthouse from*
£4,699PP	£5,099PP	£5,299PP	£5,599PP	£5,999PP

 **ONLINE CRUISE CODE: AME7746**

Experience the tropical treasures of the Caribbean in unrivalled luxury during an unforgettable cruise on board Explora Journeys' brand-new ship, EXPLORA I.


Exquisitely composed, she promises European elegance, joy, exploration across oceans, and unforgettable discovery. With four spectacular pools, an array of dining delights to suit every palette and enriching entertainment, your days at sea can be as relaxing or as rejuvenating as you like.

Your inimitable all-inclusive journey will showcase the best of the Caribbean. Remarkable highlights include, the beautiful beaches of Bonaire, an overnight in port in characterful Curacao, and the picturesque landscapes of Kingstown.

★★★★★

All-Inclusive stay at the O2 Beach Club & Spa, Barbados

A tropical paradise set on a powder white beach fringing the pristine waters of the Caribbean Sea. With a host of dining and relaxation options, this island haven provides the perfect setting for an indulgent Barbados holiday.



Your Holiday Includes

- **All-Inclusive Journey**
Nine-night all-inclusive luxury journey on board the brand-new EXPLORA I
- Visiting: Barbados, Roseau, Kralendijk, Willemstad (Overnight in Port), Saint Pierre, Kingstown, Barbados
- **Complimentary Luxury Hotel Stay**
Three-night five-star all-inclusive hotel stay in Barbados at the O2 Beach Club & Spa
- **All Flights and Transfers**
London departure - regional flights available

*Prices and itinerary shown are based on January 28, 2024 departure. Ocean Grand Terrace Suite and Penthouse prices are based on November 24, 2023 departure. Main image is intended for illustrative purposes only.





All-Inclusive South America Explorer with Machu Picchu & Iguazu Falls

29 nights | February 28, 2024

Prices from £5,499PP



Experience the best of South America on this all-encompassing cruise holiday encountering some of the world's most iconic wonders.

Your holiday begins in Rio de Janeiro with a two-night stay to breathe in its vivacious atmosphere and relish a breathtaking Christ the Redeemer tour.

Iguazu then awaits, where you'll embrace Iguazu Falls' majesty during tours of its Argentinian and Brazilian sides and respective hotel stays.

Flying next to Buenos Aires, following a two-night stay, you'll join the illustrious Oosterdam for your luxurious fourteen-night cruise. Highlights include an overnight in Buenos Aires, 'End of the World' Ushuaia, and scenic cruising through the striking Chilean fjords.

Disembarking in San Antonio, you'll spend two-nights in Santiago before flying to Cusco for thrilling tours of the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu. Finally, you'll enjoy two nights in Lima and a Palomino Island tour.

Your Holiday Includes

All-Inclusive Cruise

- 14 night All-Inclusive cruise on board Oosterdam
- **Complimentary Upgrade** to Holland America's 'Have it all' package
- **Complimentary Ocean View** to Verandah upgrade

Hotel Stays

- Five-star hotel stays in Iguazu and Sacred Valley
- Four-star hotel stays in Rio de Janeiro, Iguazu, Buenos Aires, Santiago, Cusco and Miraflores
- All hotel stays include breakfast

Fully Escorted Tours

- Tours of Christ the Redeemer, Walking tour of Iguazu Falls including both the Brazilian and Argentinian sides of the falls, Santiago City Tour, Sacred Valley Tour, Machu Picchu Tour and Walking City Tour of Cusco

Complimentary Palomino Islands tour

All Flights and Transfers

- London departure



India's Iconic Golden Triangle, China's Ancient Treasures & Luxury Cunard Voyage

19 nights | March 7, 2025 | Prices from £4,299pp



SALE EXTENDED: SAVE UP TO £2,000 PER COUPLE* ENDS SEPTEMBER 9, 2023

From India's gleaming delights and China's ancient wonders to the decadence of a Cunard cruise, embark on this unforgettable discovery holiday.

In Delhi you'll begin your phenomenal tour of India's Golden Triangle: discover Delhi's colourful streets and multi-layered history, marvel at Agra's world-famous Taj Mahal and seek architectural splendour in Jaipur.

Flying to Singapore, you'll stay the night before joining Cunard's Queen Elizabeth for a

sophisticated sailing to Hong Kong. On board, you'll explore Vietnam's Chan May and enjoy an overnight in port in the 'City of Life', before disembarking for a hotel stay.

From Hong Kong, you'll then fly to X'ian for two nights and visit the haunting Terracotta Army, before travelling by rail to Beijing for three nights. From the colossal Great Wall of China to exploring the Summer Palace and Forbidden City, your time here will inspire.



Explore India's Golden Triangle

The varied jewels of India come alive with a world-renowned Golden Triangle tour. Discover India's major cities including Jaipur, where you'll find the epic hilltop Amber Fort. In Delhi, other vibrant sights include Red Fort, where luminous orange walls are a stark contrast to its verdant gardens.

The highlight of your tour is Agra, where lies the ivory-white Taj Mahal: a 240-foot mausoleum that personifies India's artistry, wealth, and prosperity.

Your Holiday Includes

Full-Board Cruise

- Six-night full-board cruise on board Queen Elizabeth
- **Visiting:** Singapore, Chan May, Hong Kong (overnight in port)

- **Complimentary** Oceanview to Balcony upgrade

Fully Escorted Tours

- **Complimentary** Tours of Jama Masjid Mosque, Raj Ghat, Humayun's Tomb, Qutub Minar and more, Tour of the Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, Fatehpur Sikri, Amber Fort, Hawa Mahal, the City Palace, Jantar Mantar Observatory and more
- Tours of Terracotta Warriors, Great Wall of China and Summer Palace and Temple of Heaven, Forbidden City and Tian'anmen square

Luxury Hotel Stays

- **Complimentary** five-star hotel stays in Delhi, Agra and Jaipur
- Five-star hotel stays in Singapore, Hong Kong, Xi'an and Beijing

All Flights and Transfers

- London departure – regional flights available

Fly Cruise prices from

INSIDE	£4,299 _{pp}
OCEANVIEW	£4,799 _{pp}
BALCONY	£5,299 _{pp}
GRILL SUITE	£6,499 _{pp}

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: ASA7857

*Prices include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing a Grill Suite.

IMAGINE CRUISING
MORE THAN JUST A CRUISE.

For Imagine Cruising bookings call

0808 304 6498

thetimes.co.uk/imagine
Opening Hours: Monday to Sunday 9am–8pm

TIMES Travel Offers



No-Fly Cunard Voyage, Italian Lakes & All-Inclusive Venice Simplon-Orient-Express

17 nights | September 5, 2024 | Prices from £5,999pp



COMPLIMENTARY OCEANVIEW TO BALCONY UPGRADE | EXCLUSIVE TO IMAGINE CRUISING

Savour a timeless journey on board the luxury Venice Simplon-Orient-Express and delve into the wondrous Italian Lakes, paired with a Cunard voyage on board elegant Queen Anne.

You'll begin your holiday in Paris, embarking the luxurious Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, savouring refreshing drinks and exceptional cuisine on your way to Verona.

From Verona, you'll begin your Italian Lakes experience with stays in lakes Garda, Maggiore, and Como. And witness stunning mountain

scenery on board the Bernina Express on your journey to St Moritz.

Florence then awaits, where you can explore centuries-old architecture during a two-night stay, before you'll embark Queen Anne in Civitavecchia, relishing luxurious cabins, gourmet dining, and grand ballrooms between calls to Livorno, gateway to Pisa, and sun-drenched Lisbon, the capital of Portugal.

Your cruise ends in Southampton, where you'll disembark for your journey home.



Rail Journey on the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express

Harking back to a more elegant age of travel, on board the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, you'll journey through the countryside in original 1920s carriages, featuring Lalique glass panels, mahogany wood marquetry and wood burning stoves.

Experience gracious service as you dine in the restaurant car on a menu of delectable cuisine, returning to your compartment to discover that your private lounge has been effortlessly converted into a beautiful bedroom.

Your Holiday Includes

Full-Board Cruise

- Seven-night full-board cruise on board the BRAND-NEW Queen Anne
- Visiting: Civitavecchia, Livorno, Lisbon, Southampton

Rail Journeys

- Standard Premier Eurostar rail journey from London to Paris
- Two-day full-board luxury Venice Simplon-Orient-Express train journey from Paris to Verona
- Complimentary scenic rail journey through the Swiss Alps on board the Bernina Express

Complimentary Hotel Stays

- Four-star hotel stays in Lake Garda, Lake Maggiore, Lake Como and Florence
- All hotel stays include breakfast

All Transfers

No-Fly Cruise prices from

INSIDE	£5,999pp
OCEANVIEW	£7,299pp
BALCONY	£7,299pp
GRILL SUITE	£9,299pp

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: MED7722

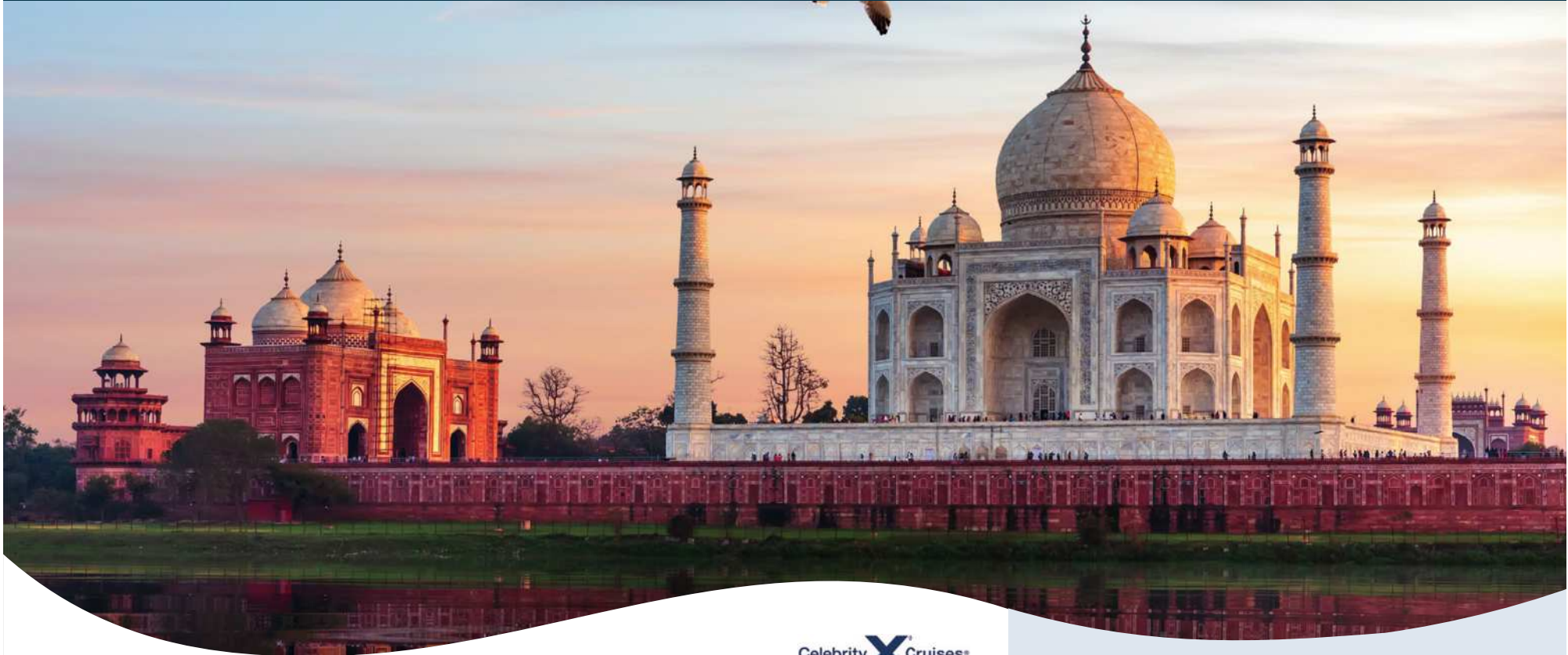
IMAGINE
CRUISING
MORE THAN JUST A CRUISE.

For Imagine Cruising bookings call

0808 304 6498

thetimes.co.uk/imagine
Opening Hours: Monday to Sunday 9am-8pm

TIMES Travel Offers



Taj Mahal, The Himalayas & All-Inclusive Celebrity Voyage



24 - 27 nights | Nov, 2024 - Feb, 2025 | Prices from £3,999pp^

SEVEN DAY SALE: SAVE UP TO £1,000 PER COUPLE* ENDS SEPTEMBER 8, 2023

Savour an all-inclusive cruise on board **Celebrity Millennium®** before marvelling at India's famed **Golden Triangle**, complete with a magical safari experience and an unforgettable rail journey through the Himalayas.

Immerse yourself in the tantalising tastes of Singapore before you embark the magnificent **Celebrity Millennium®** for your cruise to Mumbai. Highlights include an overnight in port in Penang, idyllic Phuket, nature-filled Hambantota, and laidback Goa.

Following an overnight in port in Mumbai, you'll disembark and transfer to Delhi for a two-night hotel stay and a series of unforgettable tours to the inimitable Taj Mahal and Ranthambore National Park – savouring jungle safaris searching for India's wildlife – as well as a hotel stay in the 'Pink City' of Jaipur.

Following another night in Delhi, you'll take the Shatabdi Express to Kalka, connecting to the Shimla Express for a three-night Shimla stay, exploring the Himalayas on a walking trail.



Rail Journey on the Kalka-Shimla Toy Train

Embark the Kalka-Shimla Toy Train for a journey through a spellbinding UNESCO World Heritage site railway track. Step back in time on board as this compact train, built in 1903, whizzes through 102 tunnels, Gothic bridges, and angles around tight twists and stunning curves on this epic track.

As the Shimla Express winds its way upwards, you'll delight in breathtaking vistas of mountains, waterfalls, pine forests, and jungles of wildflowers.

Your Holiday Includes

All-Inclusive Cruise

- 12 night all-inclusive cruise on board **Celebrity Millennium®**
- **Visiting^**: Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Phuket, Hambantota, Colombo, Cochin, Goa, Mumbai
- Classic Drinks Package, Wi-Fi and Tips included

Fully Escorted Tours

- Tour of Jama Masjid Mosque, Red Fort and Rajghat, Tour of the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort, Game drives through Ranthambore National Park*, Tour of Amber Fort by Jeep, Hawa Mahal and the City Palace, Trail walk through the Himalayas, Shimla sightseeing city tour

Rail Journeys

- Shatabdi Express to and from Kalka
- One-day rail journey from Kalka to Shimla on board the Shimla Toy Train

Rail Journeys

- Four-star hotel stays in Delhi, Agra, Ranthambore, Jaipur and Shimla with breakfast

All Flights and Transfers

- London departure - regional flights available

Fly Cruise prices from^

INSIDE	£3,999pp
OCEAN VIEW	£4,499pp
VERANDA	£4,999pp
CONCIERGE CLASS	£5,999pp
AQUAClass®	£6,999pp

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: ASA7764

*Wildlife sightings are not guaranteed. ^Prices, duration and Itinerary shown are based on November 22, 2024 departure. +Prices include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing a Veranda Cabin departing November 21, 2024 departure..

IMAGINE CRUISING
MORE THAN JUST A CRUISE.

For Imagine Cruising bookings call

0808 304 6498

thetimes.co.uk/imagine
Opening Hours: Monday to Sunday 9am-8pm

TIMES Travel Offers



Luxury Cunard Voyage from Cape Town to Southampton

18 nights | April 10, 2024
Prices from £1,699^{PP}

SAVE UP TO £4,000 PER COUPLE*

Fly Cruise prices from

INSIDE	£1,699 ^{PP}
OCEANVIEW	£2,099 ^{PP}
BALCONY	£2,499 ^{PP}
GRILL SUITE	£5,999 ^{PP}

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: AFR7328



Enjoy two nights in Cape Town and experience Transatlantic splendour, wildlife encounters and island charms on board Queen Victoria.

Embark on a transatlantic voyage with this captivating itinerary. Begin by flying to Cape Town, where you'll revel in a two-night hotel stay. Immerse yourself in the city's diverse culture and breathtaking landscapes.

Next, step on board the luxurious Cunard Queen Victoria and prepare for an unparalleled experience.

Enjoy days of relaxation at sea, savouring the ship's lavish amenities, world-class dining, and captivating entertainment.

As the voyage continues, explore the enchanting coastal town of Walvis Bay. Then, set sail for the vibrant island of Tenerife, where volcanic landscapes and charming towns beckon.

In Funchal, immerse yourself in the city's bustling markets and serene gardens. Finally, disembark in Southampton, concluding your extraordinary holiday.

Your Holiday Includes

Full-Board Cruise

- 16 night full-board cruise on board Queen Victoria
- **Visiting:** Cape Town, Walvis Bay, Tenerife, Madeira, Funchal, Southampton

Complimentary Luxury Hotel Stay

- Two-night five-star hotel stay at The Westin Cape Town with breakfast

Complimentary Outbound Flight and Transfers

- London departure – regional flights available

*Prices shown include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing a Grill Suite, sale ends September 8, 2023.



Ultra All-Inclusive Rhodes Retreat & Luxury Celebrity Mediterranean Voyage

12 nights | May - Aug, 2024
Prices from £1,999^{PP}*

COMPLIMENTARY FIVE-NIGHT FIVE-STAR HOTEL STAY

Fly Cruise prices from*

INSIDE	£1,999 ^{PP}
OCEAN VIEW	£2,299 ^{PP}
VERANDA	£2,799 ^{PP}
CONCIERGE CLASS	£3,249 ^{PP}
AQUAClass®	£3,649 ^{PP}

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: MED7743



Embrace the beauty of Rhodes during a luxury five-night escape before delving into the Eastern Mediterranean on a magical all-inclusive cruise.

You'll begin your holiday by slipping into a sun-drenched world of relaxation, culture, and history during a five-night stay at the Mitsis Grand Hotel Beach hotel - the only five-star beachfront resort in Rhodes, before flying to ancient Athens.

The remarkable Celebrity Infinity® then awaits for your sumptuous Eastern

Mediterranean sailing, taking you to glorious destinations in Greece and Turkey in inimitable Celebrity style.

Highlights of your cruise include glamorous Santorini, Mykonos' vibrant, blue-domed architecture and white cobbled streets, and a call to Turkey's Ephesus, offering gateway to historic Kuşadası. Explore ancient ruins, charming towns, bask on pristine beaches and relax with locals in quaint bars and cafés before returning to Athens where your holiday concludes.

Your Holiday Includes

All-Inclusive Cruise

- Seven-night all-inclusive cruise on board Celebrity Infinity®
- **Visiting:** Rhodes, Santorini, Kuşadası, Mykonos, Volos, Thessaloniki, Athens

- Classic Drinks Package, Wi-Fi and Tips included

Complimentary Luxury Hotel Stay

- Five-night five-star ultra all-inclusive stay in Rhodes at the Rodos Village Beach Hotel & Spa

All Flights and Transfers

- London departure – regional flights available

*Prices and Itinerary shown are based on June 3, 2024 departure.

**IMAGINE
CRUISING**
MORE THAN JUST A CRUISE.

For Imagine Cruising bookings call

0808 304 6498

thetimes.co.uk/imagine
Opening Hours: Monday to Sunday 9am-8pm



P&O CRUISES

P&O Cruises' Southampton to Sydney Discovery

49 nights | January 6, 2024
Prices from £3,699pp

SAVE UP TO £4,000 PER COUPLE*

Fly Cruise prices from

INSIDE	£3,699pp
SEA VIEW	£4,499pp
BALCONY	£5,399pp
SUITE	£7,999pp

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: REP7396



49 NIGHTS
FROM ONLY
£3,699pp

Embark on an unforgettable adult-only, half-world cruise – experiencing a plethora of paradisaal landscapes, cultures, and cuisines – before relishing a three-night Sydney stay.

Your incredible 46-night cruise begins in Southampton where you'll embark the adult-only Arcadia for your elegant voyage to Sydney.

From idyllic islands to fascinating cities and natural wonders, your iconic cruise will enable you to discover an intoxicating array of treasures, all while indulging in

world-class fine dining, convivial lounges, and luxurious spa treatments.

Highlights include scenic cruising through the extraordinary Panama Canal, New Zealand's finest maritime park, the Bay of Islands, and an overnight in port in Hawaii's idyllic capital, Honolulu.

Disembarking in Sydney, you'll then relish a three-night hotel stay. With its iconic harbour, Opera House, incredible beaches, and thriving culinary scene, you'll feel inspired as your holiday draws to a close.

Your Holiday Includes

Full-Board Cruise

- 46 night full-board adult-only cruise on board Arcadia
- **Visiting:** Southampton, Freeport (Bahamas), Port Everglades, Oranjestad, Panama Canal (Scenic Cruising), Puerto Quetzal, Manzanillo, Honolulu (overnight in port), Apia, Nuku'alofa, Auckland, Tauranga, Bay of Islands, Sydney

Complimentary Hotel Stay

- Three-night four-star hotel stay at the Mercure Sydney with breakfast

Complimentary Inbound Flight & Transfers

- London arrival - regional flights available

*Prices shown include discount and savings are based on two passengers sharing a Suite.



CUNARD

Luxury Cunard Voyage with All-Inclusive Bali & Maldives Escapes

26 nights | March 18, 2025
Prices from £5,999pp

EXCLUSIVE TO IMAGINE CRUISING

Fly Cruise prices from

INSIDE	£5,999pp
OCEANVIEW	£6,499pp
BALCONY	£7,299pp
GRILL SUITE	£11,999pp

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: ASA7837



Join Cunard's brand-new Queen Anne, for a voyage from Singapore to Dubai, paired with a luxury Bali escape and an all-inclusive Maldives retreat.

Your holiday begins in beautiful Bali, where you'll savour six nights in paradise, feeling your cares melt away amid swaying palms and gentle ocean breezes.

Following an overnight in Singapore, you'll next embark Cunard's newest ship Queen Anne for your magnificent thirteen-night voyage.

Highlights of your cruise include Malaysia's idyllic island of Penang, where cultures, cuisines and heritage blend harmoniously; Sri Lanka's colourful capital, Colombo; and an overnight in port in contemporary Dubai.

Disembarking in Dubai for an opulent hotel stay, you'll then transfer to the Maldives, a nation of endless beauty, to delight in a final all-inclusive, five-night stay.

Your Holiday Includes

Full-Board Cruise

- 13 night full-board cruise on board the BRAND-NEW Queen Anne
- **Visiting:** Singapore, Port Klang, Penang, Colombo, Abu Dhabi, Dubai (overnight in port), Maldives

Hotel Stays

- Six-night five-star all-inclusive stay in Bali at the Nusa Dua Beach Hotel & Spa
- One-night five-star hotel stay in Singapore at the Grand Park City Hall with breakfast
- One-night five-star stay in Dubai at the JW Marriott Marquis Hotel with breakfast
- Five-night four-star all-inclusive hotel stay in the Maldives at the OBLU XPERIENCE Ailafushi

All Flights and Transfers

- London departure – regional flights available

Main image is for illustrative purposes only.

IMAGINE
CRUISING
MORE THAN JUST A CRUISE.

For Imagine Cruising bookings call

0808 304 6498

thetimes.co.uk/imagine
Opening Hours: Monday to Sunday 9am–8pm

TIMES Travel Offers



SILVERSEA®

Luxury Silversea Cruise, All-Inclusive Bali Bliss & Japan in Bloom

23 nights | March 14, 2024 | Prices from £7,999pp



COMPLIMENTARY VISTA SUITE TO CLASSIC VERANDA SUITE UPGRADE

Discover the compelling contrasts of blissful Bali and scintillating Tokyo during this incredible cruise holiday, paired with a thrilling tour of Mount Fuji.

Cliffside temples overlooking the sea, tranquil sunsets that turn the sweet-smelling nutmeg forests gold and active volcanos looped with walking trails that reveal beautiful views: Bali has it all. And it's where your holiday begins with a five-night beach escape at the luxurious Nusa Dua Hotel & Spa.

Next, you'll embark the fabulous Silver Muse and settle in for an all-inclusive Southeast Asia cruise that explores the Philippines, Tai-Wan, and the jewels of Japan.

Your cruise ends in Tokyo where you'll enjoy a hotel stay and a tour of Mount Fuji. One of the world's most endlessly fascinating cities, its where ancient shrines nestle in the shadow of high-rises and the cherry blossom season garlands the streets in a riot of pink.



Explore Bali

Cliffside temples overlooking the sea, sunsets that turn nutmeg forests gold, and active volcanos with walking trails: Bali has it all. Whether you're after luxury resorts and holistic spa treatments, or white sand beaches and sleepy fishing villages, you won't be disappointed during your time here.

Escape the usual tourist traps and seek out lush green fields stretching across the landscape, and historical sights telling of the island's Hindu heritage.

Your Holiday Includes

Complimentary Fully Escorted Tours

- Tour of Mount Fuji including the Hakone Ropeway cable car
- Boat trip across Lake Ashi
- High-speed bullet train to Tokyo

All-Inclusive Cruise

- 16 night all-inclusive luxury cruise on board *Silver Muse*
- **Visiting:** Bali, Coron, Manila, Kaohsiung, Keelung, Naha, Kagoshima, Osaka, Yokohama (Tokyo)
- Complimentary premium shore excursions included at every port*
- **Complimentary** Vista Suite to Classic Veranda Suite Upgrade

Complimentary Hotel Stays

- Four-night five-star all-inclusive hotel stay in Bali at the Nusa Dua Beach Hotel & Spa
- Three-night four-star hotel stay at the Grand Nikko Tokyo Daiba

All Flights and Transfers

- London departure - regional flights available

Fly Cruise prices from

VISTA SUITE	£7,999pp
CLASSIC VERANDA SUITE	£7,999pp
SUPERIOR VERANDA SUITE	£8,399pp
DELUXE VERANDA SUITE	£8,699pp

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: ASA7639

*Offer includes one excursion per guest, per port/day. Additional excursions available at an extra charge.

IMAGINE CRUISING
MORE THAN JUST A CRUISE.

For Imagine Cruising bookings call

0808 304 6498

thetimes.co.uk/imagine
Opening Hours: Monday to Sunday 9am-8pm

TIMES TravelOffers



Cunard Alaska Voyage, Rocky Mountaineer & Calgary Stampede

18 nights | June 20, 2024 | Prices from £5,499pp

TWO-DAY TICKET TO CALGARY STAMPEDE | JUST LAUNCHED FOR JUNE 2024

Enjoy an unforgettable Alaskan voyage and opulent Rocky Mountaineer rail journey through the Canadian Rockies before embracing the ‘Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth,’ the Calgary Stampede.

Your holiday begins with a night in Vancouver, before you’ll embark the regal Queen Elizabeth for your intriguing Alaskan voyage. Discover Ketchikan’s Indigenous heritage, glimpse bald eagles in Juneau, and marvel at Hubbard Glacier, North America’s largest glacier.

You’ll next embark on a Rocky Mountaineer rail journey through the Canadian Rockies. Discover spectacular gorges with a stop in Kamloops before two nights in Banff, where you’ll breathe in crisp mountain air during tours of Banff National Park and Lake Louise.

You’ll then transfer to bustling Calgary for a three-night stay and experience the spirited Calgary Stampede, witnessing lively rodeos and bull riding and sampling traditional North American snacks.



Experience the Calgary Stampede

See thrilling Wild West-style equestrian events at the one-of-a-kind Calgary Stampede, a ten-day long celebration with midway rides and bucking broncos.

Known as “The Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth”, the Calgary Stampede is a highlight of Canada’s events calendar. Established in 1912, the Calgary Stampede has evolved to become a world-class music, food and entertainment festival.



Your Holiday Includes

- Full-Board Cruise**
 - Ten-night full-board cruise on board Queen Elizabeth
 - Visiting:** Vancouver, Ketchikan, Tracy Arm Fjord (scenic cruising), Juneau, Haines, Hubbard Glacier (scenic cruising), Sitka, Victoria, Vancouver
- Fully Escorted Tours**
 - Banff National Park tour including a visit to Lake Louise
 - Two-day ticket to the Calgary Stampede
- Rail Journey**
 - Two-day luxury Rocky Mountaineer rail journey from Vancouver to Banff
 - Optional upgrade to GoldLeaf service for £995pp**
- Hotel Stays**
 - Four-star hotel stays in Vancouver, Kamloops, Banff and Calgary
- All Flights and Transfers**
 - London departure

Fly Cruise prices from

INSIDE	£5,499 _{pp}
OCEANVIEW	£5,999 _{pp}
BALCONY	£6,699 _{pp}
GRILL SUITE	£8,499 _{pp}

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: AME7584

Main image is intended for illustrative purposes only.



Luxury All-Inclusive Zambezi Queen River Cruise with Victoria Falls & Cape Town Stay

11 nights | January - December, 2024
Prices from £4,399^{pp}[^]

SAVE UP TO £1,000 PER COUPLE ENDS SEPT 7, 2023*

Holiday prices from[^]

STANDARD SUITE	£4,399 ^{pp}
MASTER SUITE	£4,999 ^{pp}



Experience a thrilling African adventure with a three-night stay in captivating Cape Town, adrenaline-inducing safaris, a spectacular Victoria Falls tour, and a luxury Zambezi Queen river cruise.

Your awe-inspiring holiday begins with three nights in the 'Mother City' of Cape Town, alongside a fascinating Cape Peninsula tour that highlights captivating ocean views and wildlife encounters.

During three nights in Pilanesberg, you'll savour guided game drives, seeking Africa's

iconic Big Five* within the bushveld of Pilanesberg National Park. A three-night stay in Livingstone follows, where you'll witness the magnificent Victoria Falls – the planet's largest waterfall – during a fully escorted walking tour.

Finally, you'll embark the opulent floating hotel, Zambezi Queen, for a two-night Chobe River cruise, where water-based safaris, wildlife encounters, and a cultural tour to a remote Namibian village await.

Your Holiday Includes

Full-Board Cruise

- Two-night full-board luxury cruise on board Zambezi Queen
- Water-based game viewing and bird watching
- Cultural tour of a local village

Fully Escorted Tours

- Full-day Cape Peninsula Tour
- Two Game Drives per day in Pilanesberg National Park*
- Walking tour of Victoria Falls

Hotel Stays

- Three-night four-star hotel stay in Cape Town at the Southern Sun the Cullinan with breakfast
- Three-night four-star hotel stay in Pilanesberg National Park at the Shepherd's Tree Game Lodge with breakfast, lunch and dinner
- Three-night five-star stay at The Victoria Falls Hotel with breakfast

All Flights and Transfers

- London departure - regional flights available

^Prices shown are based on February 26, 2024 departure date. *Prices shown include discount and savings based on 2 passengers sharing a Standard Suite departing January 20, 2024. +Wildlife sightings are not guaranteed.



Luxury All-Inclusive Andean Rail Journey & Machu Picchu Tour

11 nights | March 7, 2024
Prices from £4,399^{pp}

SALE NOW ON: SAVE UP TO £1,400 PER COUPLE* - ENDS SEP 14, 2023

Holiday prices from

BUNK BED	£4,399 ^{pp}
TWIN BED	£5,299 ^{pp}
SUITE	£5,799 ^{pp}



Experience one of the world's highest train routes on board Belmond's Andean Explorer and encounter the astounding Machu Picchu on this phenomenal holiday.

Your holiday begins with a hotel stay in Lima where you'll relish fully escorted tours of the city and visit the Larco Museum. Cusco then calls for a two-night hotel stay and a fully escorted tour of the city's most enthralling sights. Next, you'll transfer to the spellbinding Sacred Valley. Discover several ancient

Incan sites and marvel at awe-inspiring landscapes during a memorable tour and hotel stay, before returning to Cusco. Here you'll explore the astounding Machu Picchu and embark on a fascinating Expedition Train journey.

The following day you'll join Belmond's Andean Explorer for an all-inclusive journey through the time-honoured lands of Peru. En route through the Peruvian highlands to Arequipa, you'll enjoy stops in charming Puno and the majestic Lake Titicaca.

Your Holiday Includes

Luxury Rail Journey

- Three-night all-inclusive luxury Belmond Andean Explorer rail journey from Cusco to Arequipa with off-train excursions at Puno and Lake Titicaca

Fully Escorted Tours

- Highlights of Lima Tour
- Walking City Tour of Cusco
- Sacred Valley Tour
- Machu Picchu Tour with Expedition Train journey

Hotel Stays

- Five-star hotel stay in Sacred Valley
- Four-star hotel stays in Lima, Cusco and Arequipa
- All hotel stays include breakfast

Extend Your Stay: Three-nights in Rio de Janeiro from £499^{pp}

- Three-night four-star hotel stay in Rio de Janeiro
- Tour of Christ the Redeemer

All Flights & Transfers

- London departure - regional flights available

*Prices shown include discount and savings based on two passengers booking directly with Imagine Holidays.

IMAGINE
HOLIDAYS
MORE THAN JUST A HOLIDAY.

For Imagine Holidays bookings call

0808 304 2925

thetimes.co.uk/imagineholidays
Opening Hours: Monday to Sunday 9am-8pm

TIMES Travel Offers



Enticing Douro

Seven nights | Nov & Dec, 2023
Prices from £1,399^{PP}

COMPLIMENTARY BALCONY UPGRADE^

Holiday prices from*

WINDOW	£1,399 ^{PP}
BALCONY	£1,399 ^{PP}

Absorb a remarkable Douro river cruise and explore the historic and cultural treasures of sun-drenched Portugal.

Your unforgettable journey begins in Porto where you'll embark the charming AmaDouro for your river cruise. Highlights include a delightful quinta lunch in Entre-os-Rios before you'll explore Régua's majestic Mateus Palace and enchanting gardens. Wine tasting in Pinhão awaits before you'll venture to Vega de Terron for a captivating Salamanca tour.

You'll discover the scenic beauty of Barca d'Alva with tours of Castelo Rodrigo and a regional cuisine tasting, or a picturesque hike. From Régua, immerse yourself in charming Lamego, indulging in traditional bôlas or climbing the Holy Staircase for breathtaking views.

You'll return to Porto, the "City of Bridges", absorbing a city tour, or a scenic hike accompanied by port wine tasting, and a free afternoon to explore the city at your leisure.

Your Holiday Includes

Full-Board River Cruise

- Seven-night full-board Danube river cruise with complimentary selected drinks during breakfast
- **Visiting:** Porto, Régua, Pinhão, Vega de Terrón, Barca d'Alva, Pocinho, Pinhão, Entre-os-Rios, Porto

Included Excursions

- Entre-os-Rios Lunch at a local quinta
- Régua Mateus Palace & gardens visit
- Pinhão Local quinta wine tasting
- Vega Terron Salamanca excursion
- Pinhão Quinta de Avessada dinner
- Porto City of Bridges tour with Port wine tasting
- Other optional tours included

All Flights and Transfers

- London departure – regional flights available at a supplement

*Prices and Itinerary shown are based on December 2, 2024 departure date. ^Balcony upgrade only applicable to select departure dates and subject to availability. Ship may differ depending on departure date.



Enchanting Japan Discovery & Rail Adventure

13 nights | June - Sep, 2024
Prices from £4,399^{PP}*

SELLING FAST LIMITED TO 40 GUESTS PER DEPARTURE

Holiday prices from*

TWIN SHARE	£4,399 ^{PP}
SOLO	£5,399 ^{PP}

Discover a world of contrasts during this incredible holiday of Japan including tours and scenic rail journeys.

Japan offers a window into a world of amazing contrasts. During your 13-night tour, you'll delve into fascinating cities, serene temples, pristine gardens and ancient traditions.

Beginning with a two-night hotel stay in Tokyo, here you'll enjoy a fully guided tour taking in some of its most captivating sights including the holy

Meiji Jingu. Further touring highlights of your holiday include Mount Fuji, a visit to the breathtaking village of Shirakawa featuring traditional gassho-zukuri farmhouses, and the Hiroshima Peace Museum.

You'll also be able to soak in the natural beauty and essence of Japan with a variety of exciting rail journeys. From high-speed bullet trains reaching almost 321 kilometres per hour.

Your Holiday Includes

Hotel Stays

- Four-star hotel stays in Tokyo, Shizuoka, Takayama, Kanazawa, Kyoto, Hiroshima and Osaka
- All hotel stays include breakfast

Rail Journeys^

- Southern Japan Alps Train, Bullet Train from Shizouka to Nagoya, Sagano Romantic Train, Bullet Train from Kyoto to Hiroshima and Bullet Train from Hiroshima to Osaka

Fully Escorted Tours

- Tours of Ginza, Hamarikyu Garden, Meiji Shrine, Harajuku and Sumida River Cruise, Lake Yamanaka, Mount Fuji 5th Station, Lake Kawaguchi, Southern Japan Alps short hike, Kenrokuen Japanese Garden, Noumara Samurai House, Nijo Castle and Tea Ceremony, Kinkaku-ji Temple and more

All Flights & Transfers

- London departure - regional flights available

*Prices and itinerary shown are based on June 6, 2024 departure. ^Luggage transfer provided when travelling on Bullet Train to hotel. Main image is intended for illustrative purposes only.

**IMAGINE
HOLIDAYS**
MORE THAN JUST A HOLIDAY.

For Imagine Holidays bookings call

 **0808 304 2925**

 **thetimes.co.uk/imagineholidays**
Opening Hours: Monday to Sunday 9am-8pm





SILVERSEA®

Ultimate Africa: Thrilling Safaris, Luxury Rovos Rail & Cape Town Escape

14 nights | Feb - Apr, 2024 | Prices from £5,699pp^



SAVE UP TO £600 PER COUPLE*

Immerse yourself in Africa's spirit during scintillating safaris, a rail journey on board the opulent Rovos Rail, and tours of the magnificent Victoria Falls.

Your adventure begins with one night in Pretoria before you'll join the luxurious Rovos Rail, relishing views of Africa's diverse landscapes alongside exquisite service, luxury accommodation, and fine dining.

You'll then disembark and transfer to Livingstone for three nights at the five-star

Royal Livingstone. Nestled on the banks of the Zambezi River, you'll relish spellbinding tours including a scenic Royal Livingstone Express journey around the immense Victoria Falls.

The stunning Ivory Tree Lodge awaits for three nights in Pilanesberg. Savour opportunities to glimpse Africa's Big Five** with twice-daily game drives accompanied by your expert guide.

Flying to cosmopolitan Cape Town, you'll delight in a three-night stay with ample time to explore its highlights and surrounding winelands.



Discover Victoria Falls

Heralded as one of the must-see attractions in Africa and indeed, one of the most spectacular waterfalls in the world, Victoria Falls is a true natural spectacle. Spanning more than a kilometre and at a height of more than one-hundred metres, it is considered the largest waterfall in the world.

It is known locally as Mosi-oa-Tunya - 'the smoke that thunders' - for cascading waters that drench its surroundings in an intense mist.

Your Holiday Includes

All-Inclusive Rail Journey

- Three-night all-inclusive luxury Rovos Rail journey from Pretoria to Cape Town with off-train excursions

Fully Escorted Tours

- Pilanesberg National Park game drives
- Walking tour of Victoria Falls*
- Lady Livingstone river safari*
- Royal Livingstone Express train journey including a five-course dinner and drinks

Hotel Stays

- Five-star hotel stays in Johannesburg and Pretoria
- Four-star hotel stays in Pilanesberg National Park with breakfast lunch and dinner, Livingstone and Cape Town
- All hotel stays include breakfast

All Flights and Transfers

- London departure - regional flights available

Fly Cruise prices from^

PULLMAN TWIN	£5,699pp
DELUXE TWIN	£5,699pp
SOLO	£7,999

^Prices shown are based on April 3, 2024 departure date. *Prices shown include discount and savings based on booking directly with Imagine. **Wildlife sightings are not guaranteed.+Only available on February 22, 2024 departure date.

IMAGINE
HOLIDAYS
MORE THAN JUST A HOLIDAY.

For Imagine Holidays bookings call

0808 304 2925

thetimes.co.uk/imagineholidays
Opening Hours: Monday to Sunday 9am-8pm

TIMES Travel Offers